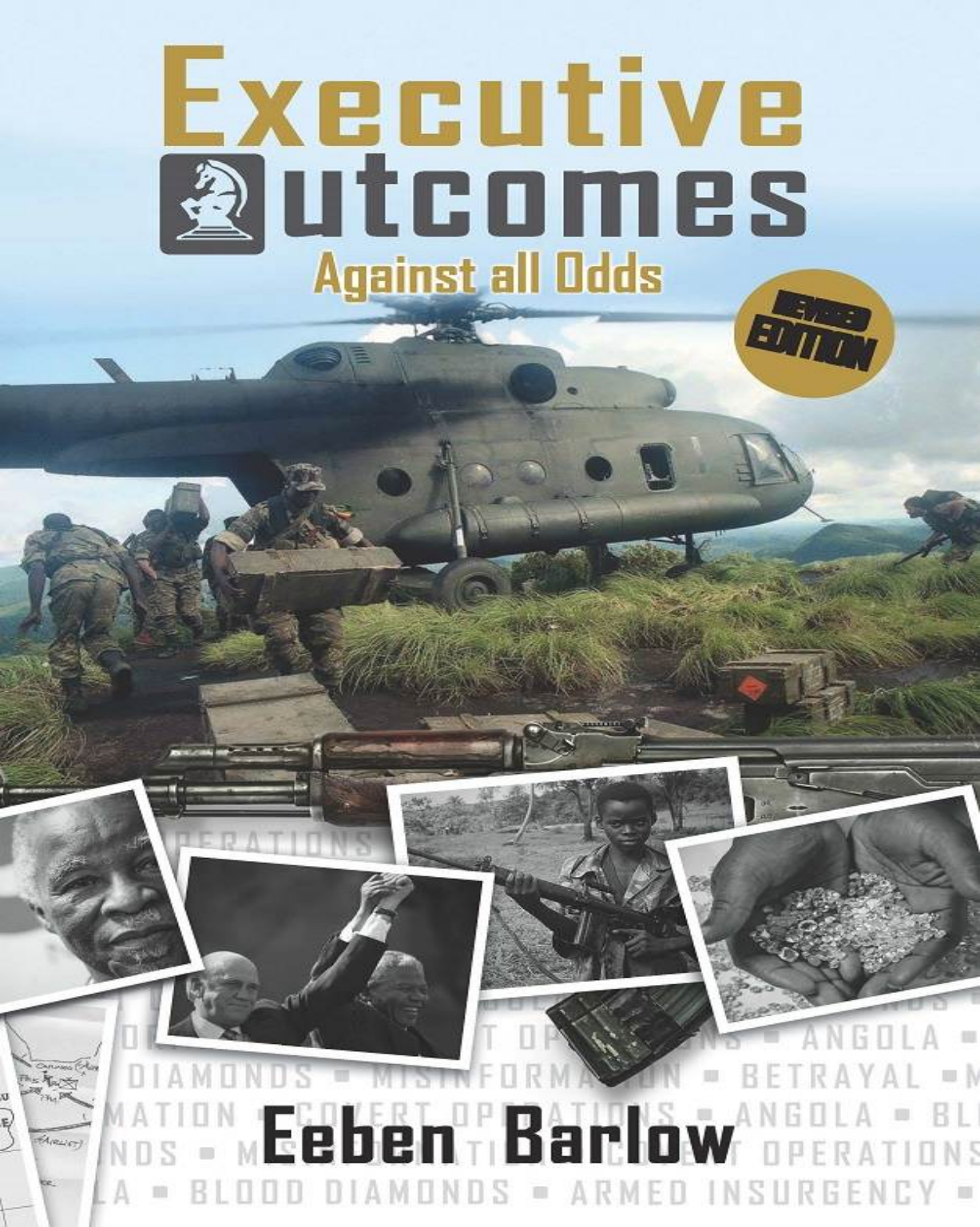
Executive Outcomes

Against all Odds



Eeben Barlow

Executive Outcomes

Against all Odds

Revised Edition

By

Eeben Barlow

Also by Eeben Barlow Composite Warfare

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For the soldiers and airmen I had the great honour of serving with, and at times commanding, especially the men of 32 Battalion Reconnaissance Wing;

And for my agents who frequently risked so much and asked only for my loyalty and support;

And for the governments who saw through what was being said and written about Executive Outcomes and continued to call on us for help;

And especially for the men of Executive Outcomes, who turned their faces to the wind, and despite incredible odds, triumphed where others had failed.

To those who made it back and those who didn't—you were giants among men.

May you never be forgotten.

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Abbreviations

AA . Anti-aircraft
AAA Anti-aircraft artillery
ABC Australian Broadcasting Corp
AFRC Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Sierra Leone)
AFV Afrikaner Volks Front
AFV Armoured Fighting Vehicle
AGS-17 30mm grenade launcher
AGNU Angolan Govt of National Unity
AN-12 .Antonov 12, four-engine turbo prop transport aircraft
AN-32 Antonov 32, two-engine, short-to-medium range transport aircraft
ANC African National Congress
APLA Azanian People's Liberation
Army PAC's military wing
AWB Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging
B-10 . Russian recoilless rifle
B-12 Russian recoilless rifle
BDF . Botswana Defence Force
BM-21 Russian, wheeled 122mm multiple rocket launcher
BMP . Russian tracked infantry fighting vehicle
BOSS . Bureau for State Security (South African forerunner to NIS and then NIA)
BPA Boere People's Army
BRA Bougainville Revolutionary Army
BTC . Benguema training camp
C-130 US Lockheed four-engine Turboprop tactical cargo and troop aircraft
CAW Children associated with war (Sierra Leone)
CCB Civil Cooperation Bureau (Covert SA Special Forces unit)
CDF Civil Defence Forces
CDF Chief of Defence Force
CDIO Chief Directorate Intelligence Operations
CIA Central Intelligence Agency (US foreign intelligence agency)
CID Criminal Investigation Department
CI. Counter Intelligence
CI Ops Counter Intelligence Operations
CNDD National Council for Defence of Democracy
CODESA Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CSI Chief of Staff Intelligence SADF
D-30 . Russian 122mm towed howitzer
D-40 . Forerunner of CCB
DCC Directorate of Covert Collection (SADF military intelligence)
DEA Drug Enforcement Administration (US)
DF Direction finding or defensive fire
DF SOS Defensive fire (save our souls), called in if enemy over-running own positions
DFA Department of Foreign Affairs
DIA Defence Intelligence Agency
DRC Democratic Republic of Congo
Dshk . Russian 12.7mm machine gun
DSO Directorate Special Operations (Scorpions)
DST Directorate of Special Tasks (South African military intelligence)
DZ .Drop zone

EB (Echo Bravo), Author's call sign
ECOMOG Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States
EMLC Electronic, Magnetic, Logistical Component Technical Consultants and Manufacturers (Pty) Ltd. Special Forces technical front company
FAA Angolan Armed Forces
FAPLA Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, renamed FAA
FUR Forward Looking Infra-Red
FOO Forward observation officer
FNLA National Front for the Liberation of Angola (resistance movement)
GCHQ Government Communications HQ, British signals intelligence
GIT . Geo International Trading
GNU Government of National Unity
GRU Soviet military intelligence
GS2 . Army Intelligence
GSG Gurkha Security Guards
HAG Helicopter Administrative Area (from Afrikaans)
HRW Human Rights Watch
IFV Infantry Fighting Vehicle
IL-76 Ilyushin 76, a 4-engine, medium-range, strategic cargo and troop aircraft
IFP Inkatha Freedom Party
IMF International Monetary Fund
ISS Institute of Security Studies (formerly Institute of Defence Studies)
JMC Joint Monitoring Commission
KGB Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Soviet intelligence and security organisation)
LAW Light antitank weapon
LLA Lesotho Liberation Army
LZ Landing zone
M-72 . US disposable anti-tank rocket launcher
M-79 US 40mm grenade launcher
MAG NATO 7.62mm belt-fed machine gun
MK . Military Kommand—Umkhonto we Sizwe (ANC's military wing)
MI Military Intelligence (South Africa)
MI5 British internal security intelligence organisation
MI6 British external security intelligence organisation
Mi-8 Russian Mil-8, twin-turbine transport helicopter
Mi-17 Russian multi-role helicopter, upgraded export variant of the Mi-8
Mi-24 Russian combat helicopter gunship with limited troop-carrying capacity
Mig-23 Russian, swept-wing fighter aircraft
Mk-19 40mm automatic grenade launcher
MONUC UN Mission to the DRC
MPLA Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MPRI Military Professional Resources, Inc.
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO Non-governmental organisation
NIA National Intelligence Agency (RSA)
NICOC National Intelligence Co-ordinating Committee (RSA)
NIS National Intelligence Service (RSA)
NP National Party (RSA)
NPA National Prosecuting Authority
NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC National Provisional Ruling Council of Sierra Leone
OAU Organisation of African Unity
PAC Pan Africanist Congress

PC-7 .Swiss Pilatus turbo trainer, a low-wing Tandem-seat training aircraft
PASL People's Army of Sierra Leone
PKM Russian 7.62x54mm machine gun
PLAN People's Liberation Army of Namibia
PLO Palestine Liberation Organisation
PMC Private military company
PNG Papua New Guinea
PNGDF Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PRA People's Republic of Angola
PW Radio call sign for EO surveillance aircraft
RDF Rapid deployment force
RENAMO National Resistance Movement of Mozambique
RPF Rwandan Patriotic Front
RPG Russian rocket propelled grenade (anti-tank weapon)
RSNGWD Royal Saudi National Guard, Western Deputation
RSLMF Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force
RUF Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
S & R Search and rescue
SACTU South African Congress of Trade Unions
SACP South African Communist Party
SADEA South American Drug Enforcement Agency
SADF South African Defence Force
SAEC South African Engineer Corps
SAM-7 Russian shoulder launched surface-to-air missile
SAMID South African Military Intelligence Division
SANDF South African National Defence Force
SAS Special Air Service (British)
SAP South African Police
SAPS South African Police Services
SARS South African Revenue Services
SASS South African Secret Service
SDCI Sub-division Counter Intelligence (RSA)
SDECE French intelligence service
SIG EO's Strategic Intelligence Group
SIS EO's Strategic Intelligence Summary
SLA Sierra Leone Army
SLPP Sierra Leone People's Party
SSC State Security Council (RSA)
SSO Senior Staff Officer
Stratcom Strategic communications, propaganda, disinformation
SU-22 Russian high speed, medium range low-level ground attack reconnaissance aircraft
SWA South West Africa (now Namibia)
SWAPO South West African People's Organisation
T-34 Russian (1940-1958) medium tank with 76.2mm main gun
T-54 Russian (1947-1962) medium tank with 100mm main gun
T-62 Russian (1961-1975) main battle tank with 115mm main gun
TMA-3 Circular Yugoslavian non-metallic anti-tank mine made of cast explosives
TMM Russian wheeled mobile bridge layer
TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UAE United Arab Emirates
UDA Ulster Defence Association
ULIMO United Liberation Movement, initially based in Liberia
UNAMSIL . UN Mission in Sierra Leone

UNAVEM UN Angola Verification Mission
UNESCO UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
UNITA National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola
UNHCR UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UP United Party
USIS US Information Service
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russian Federation)
WFP World Food Programme
ZANU-PF Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZCIO Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organisation
ZIPRA Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army
ZSU-23/4 Russian tracked, quad-barrelled 23mm anti-aircraft gun

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REVISED EDITION

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Foreword

I first met Eeben Barlow in 1982.

As a young and eager reconnaissance officer with 32 Battalion, he was tasked to conduct an operation in my area of interest, Angola. It therefore came as no great surprise to me to learn that he remained active in the sphere of security and military operations after leaving the SADF. I would only much later discover the extent of his activities.

He established Executive Outcomes (EO) in 1989 as a private security-and- advisory company but, through circumstance, changed its direction to become a military advisory company, or, to use the current term, a private military company. Apart from giving specialist covert training to the SADF's Special Forces, EO provided high-level security advice, and training, to numerous foreign governments and large multi-national corporations. In addition, the company provided advice to a few NATO armed forces. It also became involved in fighting crime in South America.

After the Cuban withdrawal from Angola, the situation in that country deteriorated to such an extent that UNITA gained almost total control of Angola's oil and diamond fields. This became a crisis for the Angolan government who were dependent on these natural resources. The election results of the 1992 Angolan election were rejected by UNITA, with some apparent encouragement by outside forces, which instead opted for a return to war.

By 1993, Executive Outcomes had just completed a high-risk security operation in Angola on behalf of numerous international oil companies. It was at the time that a desperate Angolan government urgently needed help to end a decades-old conflict. The world had already turned its back on Angola. The Angolan government thus contracted EO to reorganise, retrain and provide a strategy for ending the Angolan civil war. This contract called on a private South African company to support a legitimate government to ensure its sovereignty, all by means of a legitimate contract. The contract was, however, in direct opposition to the previous South African government's policy because South Africa had, for years, supported UNITA.

Strictly speaking, South Africa could not object to EO's contract with the MPLA, because South Africa no longer had an interest in the battle between FAPLA (and later FAA) and UNITA. The Cubans had long since withdrawn from Angola, and a democratic Namibia had been established. There was thus no longer a SWAPO threat. This was, however, still unacceptable to South Africa, and it had to devise a new method of attack on the company.

Initially, oblivious to the concern it was creating, and in order to carry out its contractual obligations, EO recruited a number of men from the SADF's elite units such as the Reconnaissance Regiments, 32 Battalion, the Parachute Battalion as well as men from the South African Air Force. The majority of these men had already been retrenched from the SADF. Retrenched personnel from the police's elite Koevoet counter-insurgency unit were also recruited as well as former members of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

EO's strong points lay in its strategy development, planning, training and execution of strategy and tactics. The men at EO realised that they could not help to end the war unless the FAA were able to regain control over the country's natural resources and thus deprive UNITA of the revenue it needed to fuel the war. With their training, they re-established the Angolan 16 Brigade.

With an element of EO acting as a combat team for the brigade, they promptly set about implementing their strategy, which was approved at the highest level. This strategy led to UNITA being defeated on the battlefield and suing for peace.

Members of Military Intelligence as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs had, however, tried continuously to stop EO's activities in Angola. The other intelligence services, as well as the South African Police, were eventually drawn into a disinformation war against the company. Massive intelligence gathering operations were launched against it. Disinformation was generated and spread as far afield as the UN and other international parties and governments. Why, no-one knows—perhaps it was for their own gains? The onslaught against EO was brutally fierce and their antagonists eventually succeeded, with assistance from the Americans, to bring pressure on the MPLA government to terminate EO's contract. By then, fortunately, EO had already fulfilled its contractual obligations.

The company went on to assist the government of Sierra Leone in a likewise manner and succeeded where few others had dared to tread. Again, this brought massive South African condemnation against EO. Ironically, ex-members of the SADF were engaged in training members of the Sierra Leonean rebels in Liberia to continue the terror against the Sierra Leonean population, yet nothing was said about these men or the result of their actions.

When EO's small contingent left Sierra Leone, the UN brought in many thousands of peacekeepers to do what a handful of men had accomplished. The UN's entrance into Sierra Leone, however well intentioned, allowed the situation to slide back into anarchy and chaos, at a cost of many millions of dollars and thousands of unnecessary deaths and mutilations.

Despite intense media and political pressure on the company, Executive Outcomes then went on to assist several other governments with great success. Their successes in Angola, Sierra Leone and other countries can further be ascribed to brilliant intelligence, outstanding logistics, dynamic flexibility as well as constantly maintaining the initiative. Despite continuous allegations by the media of so-called atrocities being committed by EO, not a single shred of such evidence ever came to light. One can reasonably assume that this was part of the campaign to discredit and close the company down.

EO, however, continued with its contracts and can be justly proud of what it achieved around the world.

The company made a huge difference and directly helped to contribute to peace in southern Africa. EO has since been replaced by many thousands of UN troops who just stand by idly and watch the massacres of peoples continue.

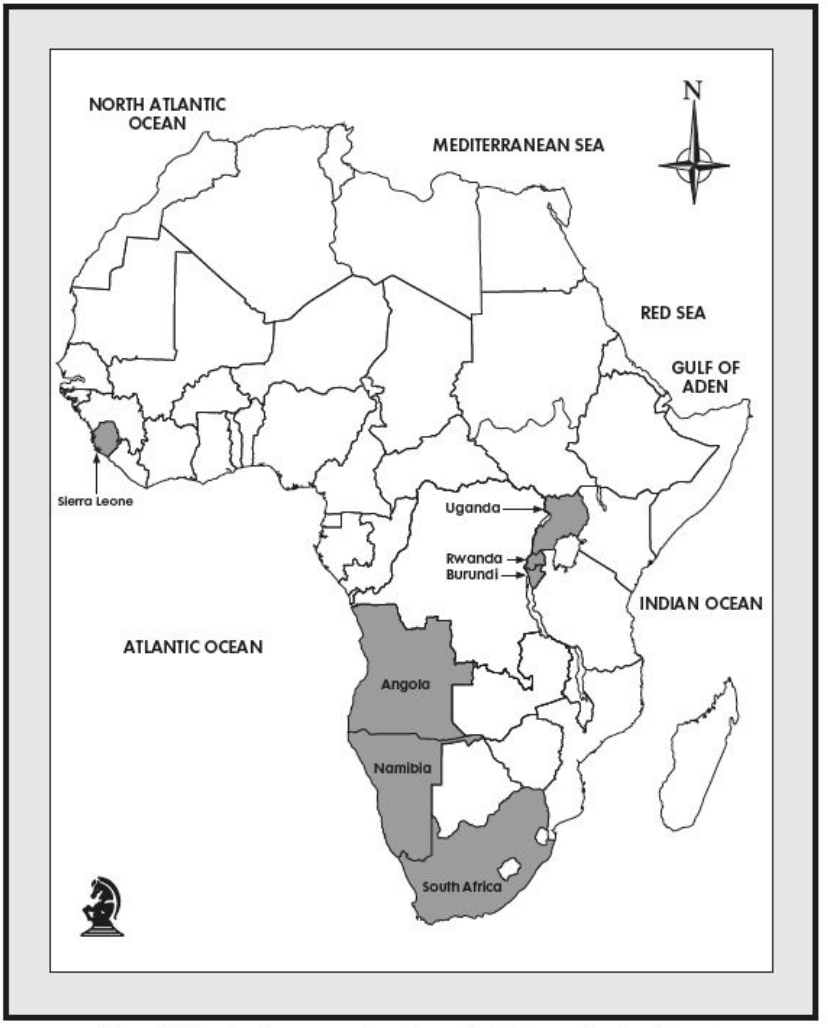
Of interest, Executive Outcomes never invaded another country, and always entered as guests and left as friends, something very few companies or even governments can boast

about. They followed their own policy of client selection to the letter and never betrayed the governments they worked for.

At a time when much has been written and said about EO, the author, Eeben Barlow, succeeds in validating events precisely in Executive Outcomes. It reads like an incident book that contains the sweet and sour of what was arguably one of the world's most controversial yet efficient private military companies.

I am honoured to write the foreword to this book and proud to have once commanded some of these men, a number of whom died while honouring their word.

(Late) Lieutenant-General R (Witkop) Badenhorst, SSAS, SD, SM, MMM Chief of Staff Intelligence, South African Defence Force, April 1989 - Nov 1991



Map of Africa showing areas where Executive Outcomes had an interest

Author's Introduction

The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is.

–Winston Churchill

When I initially decided to write the story of Executive Outcomes (EO), many ridiculed me and viewed my endeavour as an extremely petty attempt to extract revenge for duplicitous and malicious actions. It wasn't, but I will leave that for the reader to judge.

A book was the only platform I had through which to expose and rectify the malicious campaign against the company and myself. It was also my way of honouring and paying tribute to the men who served Executive Outcomes with distinction and made it what it was: a company that kept its word despite insurmountable odds; but I could not tell the story of these fine men without telling a part of my story. Executive Outcomes honoured every contract it was awarded. It never failed a government or a commercial client and several of its employees paid the ultimate price for that. Many of them were men I knew and had served with in the South African Defence Force (SADF). Some were very good friends and I mourn their deaths every day.

Shortly after it became known that I was writing the EO story, my home was burgled[1] and the almost completed manuscript disappeared along with my computer. More determined than ever to get the story of EO into the public domain, I was forced to start all over again. The burglars were never apprehended.

Numerous domestic and international publishing houses rejected the completed manuscript outright. They never gave their reasons, but I suspected it was because EO's true story didn't match the propagated narrative on the company. Only one publisher was willing to accept and print the manuscript—but only after extensive editing.

When Galago finally published the book in September 2007, it was met with stony silence by the media, and some book stores—ignoring the fact that the majority of the company's employees had been black Africans—refused to carry it on their shelves, claiming that they would not sell a book about a 'bunch of racist mercenaries'. They also chose to ignore the fact that all of the company's contracts were with legitimate governments or multinational companies. This misguided response proved to me that the disinformation campaign against us had made a much larger impact on the public's perception—and their false sense of reality—than I could ever have imagined.

Several of the men who served EO with honour wrote to me after the book had been published and thanked me for my efforts to record a part of their life history. Sadly, a few also claimed that I had lied about my SADF deployments, and even stated that I had never served in 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing, let alone as its second-in-command. Given that Executive Outcomes had refused to employ or extend contracts for some of them, and dismissed others for having transgressed the company's Code of Conduct, their utterances did not surprise me too much.

Almost two decades after its closure, there are still those in academia and the media who falsely claim that EO still exists. Old lies about the company are frequently rehashed or exchanged as 'new facts' are generated. Ironically, these 'facts' are seldom, if ever, verified or exposed for what they are.

The world has changed since the closure of Executive Outcomes in 1998, and so has my life. At the time of revision, I am the chairman of STTEP International Ltd, a company that, like EO, firmly believes that only Africans, regardless of race, can truly solve Africa's numerous problems. I still act as an advisor to some African governments and STTEP has carved its own very successful path across Africa, succeeding where many others have tried and failed. Like EO, it too has had to contend with a duplicitous media, and foreign interests that aim to stop it from assisting and supporting African governments.

Following the publication of my book Composite Warfare: The conduct of successful ground force operations in Africa in 2016, I was given the opportunity by 30 Degrees South to revise the original Executive Outcomes manuscript and have it republished. I am extremely grateful for this chance as it allowed me to rectify several errors and add some missing text. I am also extremely grateful to my editor, Marisa Robson, who spent many hours making sense of my ramblings.[1]

The story of Executive Outcomes has not changed; it has been revised and missing parts have been added.

It remains a story written in the blood of its employees and the enemy alike; the story of a small group of men who triumphed against all odds.

I hope this book will give the men who loyally served Executive Outcomes the credit they deserve. To them goes all praise and honour, and I salute them.

Eeben Barlow, Pretoria, 2017

From this day to the ending of the world, We in it shall be remembered,
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he to-day that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother.
King Henry V: William Shakespeare

01:
In the Beginning

I was born in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia)—then still one of Britain's African colonies—but I have little to no recollection of my country of birth. Nor do I have any memories of the long move from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to Bechuanaland (later renamed Botswana) when my father was transferred to that country.

Francistown, located in the north-east of Botswana, was a rather typical colonial town, thousands of miles away from the United Kingdom—and civilisation. It was here that I started my colonial schooling.

I was just four years old when the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, addressing the Union of South Africa's Parliament, gave his famous 'winds of change' speech on 3 February 1960. This speech would, unbeknown to many little colonial boys of that time, herald a major change in the world. It was also the first sign of the British government having accepted that the days of the Empire were nearing their end.

Further south, Macmillan's speech marked the first time a senior international leader had spoken out against, and given voice to, the growing protest against South Africa's strict laws of racial segregation;[2] laws that actually had their origins in British colonialism but were conveniently blamed on white South Africans.

Growing up in the dusty northern parts of Botswana, I knew little to nothing of these developments and how they would influence my life in later years. Our lives were peaceful and we almost never discussed politics or crime. As young boys, we had much to entertain our developing minds; television was unknown to us, and we amused ourselves by playing games, swimming, riding horses and donkeys, reading, and visiting friends. Going to the bioscope was our weekly treat, even if we had to sing 'God save the Queen' before the film began. There were also the inevitable rounds of comic book swapping that took place every Saturday, along with visits to Games' Café which was run by an old American who we all believed had been a cowboy. 'Grandpa Games', in turn, would regale us with tales of cattle drives, horses, hangings, and gunfights.

At John McKenzie Primary School, some of our 'imported' British teachers tried their damnedest to turn the scruffy little colonial riff-raff facing them from behind desks into English ladies and gentlemen. The results they achieved will forever remain debatable.

In the mid-1960s, my parents relocated to South Africa and I became a naturalised South African.

As a young boy I was keen to learn about the roles my father and his brothers had played during World War II when they had answered England's call for help. My mother's brothers and cousins had also fought with distinction. Several of my uncles had been killed and others had been listed as 'missing in action'.

In addition to the normal campaign medals, my uncles had brought home several decorations for gallantry, including the British Army's Military Medal and the American Bronze Star.

From an undated, yellowed-with-time newspaper clipping my mother later gave me, I learnt that US General Mark Clark[3] had personally pinned the Bronze Star to my one uncle's chest. The citation read as follows:

Sergeant Bob Roselt was also awarded the Bronze Star. He belongs to an antitank battery. On the night of November 11–12 last, while leading a patrol into enemy territory to secure information, he was fired on at close range by a machine gun and pinned down. Immediately three Germans attacked him, two tackling his arms and legs while the third clubbed him on the head with a rifle. Although beaten to his knees Sgt Roselt fought back and knocked two of them unconscious ... It is estimated that there were ten Germans in the ambush and that several of them were wounded by him before he led his men to safety. His action reflects great credit and bravery.

Although I never really knew my soldier-uncles,they,alongwithmyfather, were my real-life heroes.

We played many war games as children, and even then I could imagine the smell of cordite and the blur of movement across our fanciful smoke-filled battlefields. Along with our friends, we would retake Normandy and Arnhem, single-handedly fighting and driving off fierce, but determined, German panzer divisions. We would inevitably win our wars. I couldn't wait to become a real soldier; to wear a uniform and defend the country that had become my home with pride and honour—even with my life, if necessary.

For years I secretly longed to wear the uniform of my adopted country's armed forces. I had always considered the profession of arms to be a respectable one, characterised by loyalty and devotion to duty—a profession in which honour was held in high esteem. I believed the military to be free from the hypocrisy and evil of politics. Over the coming years I was to sadly learn that my idealistic notions were far removed from the reality.

I arrived at Kroonstad, a small town in the Orange Free State, on 4 July 1974, shortly after my 18th birthday, keen to start my twelve-month compulsory National Service training.[4] The South African Defence Force's (SADF) School of Engineers proved to be the ideal foundation for what would later become my future as a soldier, although at that time, I did not know it.

Basic training passed in a blur. Most days, we were exhausted when the lights were turned out; our instructors were hard taskmasters who never seemed to run out of energy. Daily physical training before sunrise, parade ground work, fieldcraft, musketry, demolitions, patrolling, assault river crossings, and mine warfare were the order of the day. The rigorous obstacle course added to our state of extreme fatigue but it made us fitter, stronger, and more determined never to show our instructors how exhausted we were. Over time, the few Rooinekke[5] and the Afrikaners—who we Rooinekke referred to as 'Dutchmen'—of our intake werewelded into a cohesive group of potential officer and non-commissioned officer material.

I later completed the officer selection and training. By then, I had learnt to keep my own counsel and choose my friends carefully. A wrongly uttered word could have destroyed my military dreams, as a strong anti-English sentiment still prevailed—a hangover from the Boer War. I understood the Afrikaner disdain for the British but I was not responsible for the deaths or the concentration camps in which so many Boer women and children had died.

***

I was commissioned into the South African Army's Engineer Corps (SAEC) in 1975.

In the same year, the South African Defence Force (SADF) went to war in Angola. It was a war that would continue for several years and still remains the cause of much anger, bitterness, and pain to many in southern Africa and especially in South Africa.

Angola, strategically located on the western coast of the African continent, became a Portuguese colony in 1491, and was declared an Overseas Territory of Portugal in 1951.

In 1956, the political organisation, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola[6]—deeply resenting Portuguese colonial rule—set its sights on achieving complete independence from Portugal.

In 1961, another opposing movement, the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) or FNLA, entered the fray.

In 1964, the struggle for independence was joined by a third movement, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) otherwise known as UNITA.

The armed struggle became a bloody and protracted war of independence between Portugal and the three vastly different liberation movements. It lasted from 1961 until 1975, when the Portuguese metropolitan government, unable to continue a sustained guerrilla war and brought to its knees by its own communist-infiltrated armed forces, decided to relinquish power to the Angolans and get out of Africa as fast as it could.

There were numerous clashes between the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA as all sides vied for power in the struggle to take control once the Portuguese had left Angola.

To compound matters, a power struggle developed between Augustinho Neto (the president of the MPLA) and Daniel Chipenda (the commander of FAPLA[7]— the MPLA's army). Chipenda eventually defected to the FNLA with a large portion of FAPLA, bolstering the FNLA's military position considerably.

The FNLA and UNITA, despite regarding the MPLA as a common enemy, were in no way allied. Under the leadership of Holden Roberto, the FNLA chose to operate from both Zaire[8] and the power base Chipenda had established in the south of Angola while still with the MPLA.

UNITA, operating primarily from southern Angola, was under the control of Dr Jonas Savimbi, a dedicated Maoist, and an ardent student of China's Mao Ze Dong.

Apart from fighting for a slice of Angola, Savimbi's UNITA was also supporting the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and its military wing, the People's

Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN),[9] which in turn was fighting for independence from South African administration over South West Africa.

SWAPO considered South Africa's administration in South West Africa to be an 'illegal occupation' and launched a military campaign to gain control over that country. This campaign was initially planned and directed from Tanzania.

PLAN commenced its military offensive in South West Africa in early 1966. Its first armed engagement was fought against the South African Police (SAP) in Ovamboland (northern South West Africa). A second raid was attempted on a major administrative complex in Oshikango a month later. Tribal chiefs, government installations, and white-owned farms in northern South West Africa were targeted in subsequent attacks which alarmed both the South African government and the white farming communities in South West Africa.

The first major clash between PLAN and a combined force of South African police and paratroopers took place at Omugulugwombashe on 26 August 1966. Known as Operation Blouwildebees, this action is widely regarded as the start of the South West African 'War for Independence'—more commonly known in South Africa as the 'Border War'.

PLAN's increasing cross-border activities (now launched primarily from Angola) resulted in the SADF increasing its force levels in South West Africa.

When the Portuguese hurriedly granted independence to Angola in November 1975, they decided to relinquish power, either to a coalition or to the strongest of the three liberation movements. This resulted in a chaotic scramble for power as MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA fought to grab as much territory as they could and achieve as much influence as possible.

The communist-infiltrated Portuguese armed forces initially obtained Cuba's help in restructuring, re-equipping, and retraining the MPLA's[10] armed wing (FAPLA) with the first Cuban military contingents arriving in Angola by mid-1975. With their support, FAPLA were able to dominate central and most of southern Angola, build a strong presence in the east and north of the country, and establish the MPLA as the strongest of the three factions fighting for power. The war for independence would finally culminate in an MPLA government under Augustinho Neto grabbing control of much of Angola. The FNLA and UNITA proclaimed a short-lived coalition government in the town of Nova Lisboa,[11] but a brutal power struggle between the Maoist-inspired UNITA and the quasi-democratic FNLA soon followed.

Into this maelstrom of civil war and violence stepped the super-powers—the United States and the Soviet Union. South Africa quickly became a willing participant at the USA's request.

America initially provided assistance to the FNLA which it viewed as ideologically and politically compliant, but later, for reasons of its own, it switched its support to UNITA. At that time it was speculated that this was because UNITA controlled Angola's vast diamond-rich areas.

South Africa also chose to covertly assist UNITA despite the fact that UNITA was supporting SWAPO and PLAN. Again, rumours were rife that diamonds had been the

motivation.

In late 1975 the SADF joined the civil war in Angola at the behest of the United States. A new chapter in our military history was about to be written in the blood of many young South Africans, Namibians, Cubans, Russians, and Angolans.

It was against the background of this mess that in 1975, Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the founder of the SADF's Reconnaissance Commandos, was tasked to establish contact with the FNLA at an abandoned Portuguese marine base at M'pupa (Angola) with a view to a building a military partnership. This mission would eventually lead to the establishment of Bravo Group (consisting largely of ex-FNLA members) later to become a clandestine infantry unit known as 32 Battalion that was virtually unknown to the wider South African public. It was this battalion, however, that initially bore the brunt of South Africa's war in Angola.

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With increasing support from the MPLA government of Angola—as well as from UNITA—SWAPO's military wing had sufficient support to sustain itself in the field. With weapons from the East Bloc, food and medical supplies from the Nordic countries, and political and financial support from the West, SWAPO knew that it was only a matter of time before they achieved their goal, not through the barrels of PLAN's guns, but by the international political pressure that was being placed on South Africa.

In the process, PLAN killed, maimed, intimidated, and terrorised members of the local population who did not support their ideals or whom they viewed as 'sympathisers' to the SADF.

Based in South West Africa, the SADF had deployed several infantry battalions (with very limited air support) in an effort to stop PLAN incursions and attacks directed from Angola by SWAPO planners. There were many brief and bitter firefights between South African soldiers and PLAN elements in battalion areas of operations. PLAN became adept at laying landmines on the fairly well-maintained dirt roads (ideally suited to their deployment) that served as logistical routes to the numerous battalion headquarters and their outlying company HQs. Regarded by many as a form of 'indirect fire', these landmines initially caused many human casualties and destroyed a number of vehicles, both civilian and military.

My first operational deployment (in 1977) was as an Engineer Troop commander for 16 Field Squadron (SAEC) in support of 101 Task Force commanded by Major General Ian Gleeson. My engineer troop consisted of Citizen Force members—the SADF's part-time soldiers—comprising men who had completed their National Service and were now obliged to serve annual three-month military service call- up periods commonly known as 'military camps'. The Citizen Force (CF) men who underwent these three-month call-ups were predictably referred to as 'campers'.

As a 21-year old lieutenant (temporary), I was placed in command of men who were mostly older and much more experienced than I was.

I was extremely fortunate to have a troop sergeant who, despite being old enough to be my father, took great care to guide me when he thought I needed it—which was rather often. Günter Räll was a giant of a man whose Prussian-German heritage shone through in everything he did. He was tough, strict, and made very sure that every order I issued was carried out to the letter.

The irony of the situation was not lost on me: as a child, my war games had all revolved around defeating Germans; as an officer in the SADF, I was reliant on a German non-commissioned officer (NCO) to enforce my orders. Looking back at how Günter treated me—like a younger brother who had absolutely no clue what he was doing—I can only be grateful that in my life as a young officer, I would frequently encounter men like him.

Much to my disgust we were mainly engaged in construction work—something for which I had received little training and in which I had no interest. One consolation was that I was close to the action. We filled our days constructing a forward combat base and occasionally patrolling or conducting a bit of mine warfare, but this was not the war I had envisaged myself fighting.

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Over the coming years I was to serve as the Engineer Troop commander of both the 53rd and 54th South African Infantry Battalions in the South West African theatre of operations. My sapper troop, bolstered at times by the infantry's assault pioneer platoon which was also placed under my command, was tasked with both offensive and defensive mine warfare operations.

The infantry battalions were, in turn, supported by 25 Field Squadron, SAEC, with the sappers being 'detached under operational command'. These infantry battalions, along with several others, were deployed to form a buffer-zone between the Angolan and South West African borders. It was this border area that PLAN used as a transit route (from their training, logistical, and hide-out areas in Angola) to infiltrate into South West Africa and attack South African troops, lay landmines and ambushes that disrupted logistical routes, and terrorise the local population and farming community.

sapper lifting a Soviet TM-57 anti-tank mine on one of the many dirt roads the engineers swept for landmines on a daily basis (photo: i.pinimg.com)

The National Service sappers and assault pioneers under my command were responsible for clearing the roads of landmines and giving other combat support[12] to the infantry battalions. These brave young men, who several months prior to their deployment had still been sitting behind school desks, faced danger every day. They never complained or questioned their orders. Whether their tasks involved mine clearing operations, demolitions, clearing of enemy caches, nightly mobile ambushes, or even the despised base maintenance, they gave everything they had. Additionally, they saved countless lives, both military and civilian, in their endeavours to clear enemy mines from the white sand roads that criss-crossed the so-called 'operational area' of South West Africa.

PLAN anti-tank landmines had become a major problem within 54 Inf Bn's[13] area of responsibility. My sappers and I would leave the HQ each morning before sunrise and commence sweeping operations to secure the main supply routes to the battalion HQ and to the outlying companies' HQs. This was a tedious, at times nerve- racking task, but it allowed me, over time, to develop an anti-mine ambush drill that the infantry would later adopt as standard operating procedure.

Three sappers would sweep approximately 50 metres ahead of the first vehicle in the column, a Buffel (Buffalo) mine-protected vehicle (MPV) driven by one of my men.

The Buffel was armed with a mounted 7.62mm Browning machine gun while the rest of the sweep team carried their cumbersome R1[14] assault rifles and mine detectors. If the sappers drew fire, they would rely on the sweep team protection vehicle to provide them with covering fire.

Infantry support followed approximately 50 metres behind us, also in MPVs.[15] In the event of an enemy ambush, the sapper mine team conducting the sweep would immediately drop down, take whatever cover was available, and engage the enemy with

fire while our driver raced our vehicle headlong into the ambush position with guns blazing. The infantry would follow in, debus directly onto the enemy's ambush position, and take over the firefight from us.

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It was in 1979, whilst deployed in support of 54 Inf Bn, that I first encountered men from the clandestine 32 Battalion. In particular, I admired their Reconnaissance Wing, which I accompanied on a short mission to ambush a PLAN infiltration team in Angola (my task was to mine the approach into the ambush area). On my return, I began formulating plans to join them. I discussed the matter with the then- commander of 54 Inf Bn, paratrooper Commandant[16] Anton van Graan (who I had known and jumped with during a parachute training exercise in the eastern Free State[17] in 1978). He advised me that, as an infantry commander, he had no authority to transfer me—a sapper—anywhere.

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On 1 January 1980, at approximately 06:00, I became the first of many casualties of war that year.

My sappers and I were sweeping an area commonly known as the 'pipeline'. This was a strategic sweep for the battalion as the area contained a water pipeline that fed the battalion HQ and several outlying villages. PLAN would often mine the road alongside it in order to kill whoever was trying to repair their previous sabotage attempts on it.

My sappers were approximately twenty metres ahead of the Buffel and I was manning the 7,62mm Browning machine gun to give them protective fire in the event of an ambush. A faulty mine detector missed an anti-tank mine and the vehicle I was travelling in detonated it. Moments prior to hitting the mine, I had been standing up behind the machine gun. Fortunately for me, a few seconds before detonation, I had sat down but I was still in the process of tightening my seat belt when the explosion occurred. The blast flung me into the machine gun's pistol grip, tearing a gaping hole into my head. Fortunately, the rest of my sapper team travelling on the Buffel were already strapped in and no one else was injured. The three men in the sweep team ahead of the vehicle were blown off their feet but thankfully none of them were wounded.

The Buffel MPV was used extensively in the operational area and saved many lives (photo: unknown)

Deafened by the blast, and bleeding, I was able to order my sappers off the vehicle in case we had entered an ambush area. In the damaged and stationary MPV we would have been sitting ducks to any incoming enemy RPG-7[18] fire. I also suspected the vehicle might explode and I wanted no casualties.

By that time, the infantry protection teams had already debussed from their MPVs and were deploying into their all-round defensive positions to cover us. Only once we were off the smouldering vehicle did I realise the driver was still trapped inside. Making sure my sappers were unharmed, I ran back to extricate the driver who was in severe shock from the blast and barely conscious. Then, I had to render safe another British Mk-7 anti-tank mine that had been located by one of the sappers a few metres ahead of our destroyed Buffel.

Later that day, with more than 30 stitches in my head, I was told that I could not be evacuated; there was no sapper officer available to replace me.

For some inexplicable reason, an unnamed army captain phoned my parents and told them I had been killed in an action that had resulted in me suffering a very serious head wound. My parents asked for more information on the circumstances of my death, but the mysterious captain wasn't forthcoming. Understandably, the army wanted to notify parents if their sons had been killed, but I expected them at least to wait until after I had died. My wounds were more painful than serious, but I was, nevertheless, disappointed when I discovered that phone call had been made.

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Several weeks later I was transferred to serve as the sapper commander of 53 Inf Bn under the command of Commandant (later Colonel) 'Jorrie' Jordaan. My men and I continued to sweep the dirt roads for mines, locate and lift enemy weapons caches, and destroy captured ammunition and explosives.

Jordaan was an aggressive infantry battalion commander who was not prepared to allow his battalion to adopt a defensive posture. He wanted the enemy hunted down or lured into ambushes and totally eliminated from his battalion's area of operations (AO). Aggressive infantry fighting patrols subsequently combed the AO, and company and platoon commanders were tasked to leave no stone unturned in their endeavours to locate, engage, and destroy PLAN forces. Jordaan also wanted his battalion's sappers to become more aggressive in their operations, and this suited me very well.

Under his direction and guidance, I redefined the defensive mine clearing role of the engineers and implemented a policy known as 'offensive mine hunting'. This tactic would later be claimed as the brainchild of the-then Engineer Squadron commander, a man who positively hated my guts for the fact that I was English- speaking. In turn, I considered him to be a dumb Dutchman. I was later told that he had nominated himself for a medal for 'developing' the mine-hunting concept.

Offensive mine-hunting operations entailed aggressively searching for landmines in the battalion AO by randomly sweeping and clearing selected roads, regardless of whether they were being used or not. These operations not only achieved great success, they also confused PLAN mine-laying teams, who became unsure of where to lay their mines to achieve an effect.

One incident I found particularly upsetting while conducting these operations was the unannounced deployment of a so-called mine-hunting team from 25 Field Squadron under the command of an inexperienced sapper officer, Lt Johan Van der Merwe, into 53 Inf Bn's area of operations. When I met with van der Merwe to brief him on possible threats and dangers, he offhandedly told me that the squadron commander had informed him it would not be necessary to take heed of anything I said. My advice and warnings of what to expect subsequently fell on deaf ears.

This team deployed to an outlying company headquarters at Okankolo to start their sweep. On their second day out, they struck a massive anti-tank mine. One of the surviving sappers, despite severe burn wounds, made his way back to the company headquarters and raised the alarm. The company commander immediately called for a casevac[19] helicopter and rushed off to secure the incident area.

I first heard of the incident after having been called to the battalion signals room to be briefed by Jordaan who had myself and two sappers immediately flown into the blast area by helicopter. The company commander in whose area the incident had occurred had already secured a landing zone (LZ) for the helicopter, and a platoon of infantrymen and a section of medics were waiting anxiously.

As we approached the LZ we could see the smouldering hulk of the Buffel and the devastation around it. The trees were shattered and torn, branches had been blown off, and the area around the blast was scorched. We leapt from the helicopter, weighed down with

our weapons, ammunition, rations, water, mine detectors, and pre-prepared demolition charges, and immediately started sweeping a path from the LZ towards the blast area where we found Van der Merwe, half-sitting under the shade of a small tree, quite badly burnt and still in shock. I was furious with him, but signalled the medics to attend to him and continued the sweep to the blast area.

Cautiously, the two sappers and I cleared a path to the smouldering MPV, trying to ignore the bodies of two badly burned and obviously dead sappers lying close to the vehicle. Despite the sickly smell of death, we hoped to find some signs of life on the back of the vehicle. Once we had cleared the area around the vehicle, the medics would have a safer area to work in; till then, they had been forced to wait for us to locate and render safe any possible anti-personnel mines PLAN may have placed in the area.

When we looked into the vehicle we were greeted by a horrific sight: the Buffel had struck what appeared to be a double British Mk-7 anti-tank mine boosted by additional explosives. The driver's cab had virtually been ripped off the MPV. Additionally, the diesel tanks had ruptured, causing the vehicle to be engulfed in flames. The sappers trapped in the rear of the Buffel had been burnt beyond recognition. Confronting their still smouldering and charred bodies, my anger erupted—and I charged over to where Van der Merwe was lying.

"What the fuck happened here?" I shouted.

"We hit a mine," he muttered, stating the obvious.

I had never lost a sapper in the battalions I had served in. These weren't my men but they were, nevertheless, sappers. I could only hope that their deaths had been sudden.

"Next time, I try to tell you what to look out for you fucking listen to what I have to say you fucking prick—and not to some rum-and-coke drinking arsehole at the squadron headquarters!"

Later, refusing to accept direct responsibility for what had happened, and in an effort to deflect accusations of incompetence, the squadron commander tried to lay the blame for the incident at my door. It took a long pep talk from Commandant Jordaan to assure me that I was not to blame for what had happened and to calm me down. I, in turn, wanted to travel to the squadron headquarters and shoot the arsehole. Although I argued that the sappers had been lost in my battalion area, Jordaan suggested I view it differently. His thoughts on the squadron commander matched my voiced opinions. The man was an incompetent cretin who should have been court-martialled, but, through bluster and bullshit, he'd kept his nose brown and his record clean.

After that, Jordaan never again permitted mine-hunting teams—other than those made up of his own sappers—into his battalion AO.

This incident led to a large sweep of an area known as the 'Odilla', close to the area where the sappers had been killed. My sappers and I were choppered in to join a reinforced paratrooper platoon sweeping the area to locate PLAN-laid mines, caches, and possible booby traps. Jordaan was making sure that his men covered as much area within his battalion AO as possible.

Commandant Jordaan then tasked me with planning and implementing a mobile nightly vehicle patrol aimed at luring PLAN into attacking us, using my sappers as

Author about to leave on the nightly 'suicide run' from Ondangwa when he was sapper commander, 53 Infantry Battalion.

bait. Improvising, I mounted electrically-fired 88mm anti-tank rockets to the front andback of a Buffel and wired them so that they could be remotely fired from within the back of the vehicle. The noise generated, if the rockets were fired in an ambush, would hopefully confuse and scare PLAN. In addition, my sappers and I were heavily armed with Browning and MAG machine guns, M79 40mm grenade launchers, and hand grenades. I also convinced the battalion chefs to pack us 'picnic baskets'—so that we would at least have decent meals while out trying to lure PLAN to attack us.

As the majority of PLAN infiltration operations were conducted under cover of darkness, we drove around with our vehicle lights blazing, hoping to attract the enemy like moths to a flame.

Approximately 500 metres behind us, was an infantry assault team, also in Buffels, but travelling without lights so as not to betray their presence. This team was usually commanded by Captain Nick Mostert HC,[20] one of 53 Inf Bn's company commanders. In the event of an ambush, Nick and his men would switch on their lights and race forward to attack the PLAN ambush position after we had drawn their fire.

Although this was known as the 'suicide run', I never had a problem finding volunteers to accompany me. The bickering amongst the sappers in their keenness to participate got so bad that I was forced to draw up and implement a 'suicide roster' so they would all get a chance to be part of that nightly high-risk mission. I later discovered that some sappers had actually gone so far as to 'buy out' positions.

We travelled that lonely and dangerous 80-kilometre tar road every night for a period of three months. Only once did we need to open fire and by the time the infantry reached the scene, we had done what needed to be done.

Only after he read the after-action report did Jordaan discover that Nick and I were taking part in these nightly missions. He immediately ordered us to refrain as we were key officers in the battalion. We argued that we could not ask our men to do something we were unwilling to do. This ultimately led to the demise of these missions.

As sappers we swept thousands of kilometres of road, lifted countless anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, cleared enemy weapons caches and, I believe, saved countless lives. We tamed the landmines in our battalion area, and PLAN came to realise that it was no longer worth carrying them into South West Africa from Angola.

The sappers and assault pioneers I commanded were all brave young men who were always prepared to put their lives on the line for their infantry colleagues.

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While I was serving with 53 Infantry Battalion, I met with, and befriended, members of 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing. They had an outstanding combat reputation and were highly professional in everything they did. I was still plotting to join them; I knew I wanted to be part of their tight-knit group, and for the next few weeks I did everything I could to ingratiate myself to this unit. They were conducting a pseudo-operation in the battalion's AO and, when they returned from wherever they had been, they would spend time visiting my tent and talking to me. At that time, the team consisted of Second Lieutenant Chris Roodt and Corporal Rick Lobb.

After much scheming and planning, I was finally able to extricate myself from 53 Infantry Battalion and get myself transferred to 24 Field Squadron, SAEC.

This squadron was based at Rundu—which was also home to the headquarters of 32 Battalion.

Prior to reporting to my new squadron headquarters, I approached Commandant Deon Ferreira,[21] the battalion commander, and asked if he could make use of my services. After much pleading and grovelling, he finally relented and said that if I could get myself transferred to 32 Battalion, he would send me off to the Reconnaissance Wing.

"We might just be able to use a sapper," he said as I left his office.

I promptly generated a signal and sent it from 32 battalion's HQ to 24 Field Squadron. The squadron headquarters happened to be a mere 200 metres from 32 Battalion's HQ. This false signal instructed the squadron commander, Major Appelgrein, to immediately transfer me to 32 Battalion for an undetermined period. By the time I had walked down to the squadron HQ, the signal had arrived and Appelgrein ordered me back to 32 Battalion

headquarters, telling me that I was 'on loan' to the battalion 'for a few weeks'. I walked back to 32 Battalion's HQ and reported for duty. Ferreira simply smiled and kept his promise to me. A few hours later, I was on the back of a Buffel, on my way to the Reconnaissance Wing's lonely outpost at Omauni.

Omauni was under the command of Captain Sam Heap, an experienced 32 Bn company commander. Piet Nortje was the base sergeant major. Omauni was protected by a rotational 32 Bn platoon under their command, and under their watchful gaze, it ran like a well-oiled machine.

On my arrival at Omauni, the Wing's commander, Lt Willem Ratte (Willem was later promoted to the rank of captain) subjected me to a gruelling briefing and interrogation. He was a highly professional soldier and a hard taskmaster, and came with an enviable military background that included time spent with the SAS (Rhodesia).

"I must warn you," he said, "that no one here will ever get a medal. If you are here with thatin mind, I suggest you leave immediately. We don't want any glory-hunters." "I came here to fight. I have no interest in medals and I'm not a political or religious animal. I don't care who's governing the country. I just want to be a soldier," I answered.

Willem responded with a smile, and then removed his thick glasses and wiped them (I later discovered that this was a habit).

"Good," he said, "then we'll work together just fine." And we did.

Willem left me under no illusion that if I did not make the grade, he would not hesitate to send me back to the Engineers. I, on the other hand, was determined to stay in 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing and do everything in my power never to let anyone down. If I was to be sent back to the Engineers, I didn't want it to be in disgrace.

I would, over a very short period of time, come to respect Willem greatly, both as a soldier and as a leader of men. He was my chief mentor and remains the man who had the greatest impact on my life as a soldier. He was meticulous in everything he did, and I soon found out that there were no short-cuts under his command. He was a genius in small-team operations and he taught me everything I ever knew about the subject. I also learnt things from him that were never taught on the numerous courses in the military. Most of all, he taught me how to be a leader, and how to command men under fire.

Sadly, Willem would never recover from the betrayal of the South African politicians and generals in later years and he would go on to earn a degree of infamy elsewhere. Even sadder was that intime he would come to regard me as a sell-out and a traitor to South Africa.

The small number of men who made up the Reconnaissance Wing immediately started preparing me for the missions I would partake in and at times lead. Willem, along with men like Lieutenants Jerry Green, Eric Rabie (who shortly thereafter left the Reconnaissance Wing to become a company commander in 32 Battalion), Jim Savoury, Staff Sergeant Ron Gregory, Sergeants Kevin Sydow, Kevin Fitzgerald, Peter Williams, and Phil Smith, and Corporals Robert Clifford and Gary Nettle were teachers second to none. By then, men such as Oppies Opperman, Steph Naude, Gavin Monn, Billy Botha, Rick Lobb, and others had already left the Wing. Those remaining made very sure that I

understood every aspect of commanding and leading a reconnaissance team into hostile territory and they greatly influenced my life.

A few days after I arrived in Omauni, Major Appelgrein lost a leg in a landmine incident. The in-coming squadron commander, Major Vic Thackeray, had no idea that I was actually part of his squadron and I got lost in the army's cumbersome bureaucratic system; no one knew where I was supposed to be. I had learnt the value of generating and sending fake signals to get what I wanted.

As a soldier, I had finally found my home. In the fullness of time and with my promotion to captain, I became the second-in-command of these battle-hardened men, and they happily and gracefully accepted my position and authority in the unit. They never flinched under fire, and carried out my orders without question. To me, this was the best combat experience any young officer could have hoped for. I am very proud to have served in 32 Battalion and even prouder to have served as the second-in-command of its Reconnaissance Wing.

Jim Savory and the author before a 32 Battalion Reconnaissance Wing internal ops deployment, 1981

Operating in small teams of between four and eight men, we conducted extensive offensive reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines and dealt many devastating blows to the Angolan Armed Forces.

Most of us in the Reconnaissance Wing were colour-blind; we simply saw ourselves as soldiers—not as white or black soldiers. Sadly, black soldiers who died in action were not considered significant to the South African public and they were mourned only within the battalion. There were seldom, if ever, announcements by army headquarters or notices in the press that they had been killed in action while fighting for South Africa—that honour was mostly reserved for white soldiers. No one, apart from ourselves, seemed to care.

Despite the widely held belief, both at home and abroad, that South Africa was correct in supporting UNITA, I held them in low regard and found it increasingly difficult to

swallow the fact that we were supporting a Maoist rebel group. On the one occasion we used a UNITA scout, he actually turned and ran away at the first sound of gunfire. I wasn't impressed.

Generally, the men in the Battalion also regarded UNITA with suspicion, particularly because UNITA's ranks were often swelled with PLAN cadres—the enemy that young South African soldiers in South West Africa were trying to stop.[22] Ironically, the South African government worked hard to give UNITA credit for actions in which they had never played a part, and the SADF also provided them with massive economic, logistical, military, political, and other support. This was perhaps motivated by the government's belief that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', but many of us in the Battalion remained distrustful.

One day, while sitting in the sparse shade offered by some bomb-scarred trees under the blazing Angolan sun, I made a promise to my black Angolan team members: "One day, when this war is over, I will bring you back home."

Because of the war, they had not seen or heard from their families for more than five years. Some didn't even know if their loved ones were still alive. They simply smiled at my comment, probably wondering what I had been smoking.

Little did I know that one day I would keep that promise. Why I even made such a commitment, I never really understood.

Our actions continued to bleed the Angolan military machine which seemed unable to recover fully after each blow it was dealt. Cuban, East German, and Soviet military advisors arrived in greater numbers, and within a short space of time, CIA-controlled operatives also began to fill UNITA's ranks as advisors. Angola had become a military flashpoint for several foreign powers.

During Operation Protea (September 1981) a 32 Battalion company commanded by Captain Tinus van Staden killed a number of Soviet officers and captured a senior Soviet warrant officer (Nicolai Feodorovich Pestretsov)[23] during a brief but bitter battle outside Xangongo. A number of other Soviet officers withdrew to safety.[24] Numerous Angolan troops were also killed or captured.

After a brief battlefield interrogation, the Soviet prisoner was flown to Pretoria for further debriefing. He ultimately became part of a prisoner exchange involving the British, the Americans, the West Germans, and the South Africans.

We soldiered on, often calling into question what it was that we were really doing. We lived and fought like animals—and many of the men in our battalion died like animals on the white Angolan sands. In a strange way, I found myself falling in love with Angola's beauty. I wished I had been able to see it in its glory days and hoped to see it again one day when the war was over and peace had finally returned.

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I loved my battalion and especially the Reconnaissance Wing, but I was young and naive. I was a soldier, I had a war to fight, and I wanted to be where the action was.

Years later I seriously questioned the motives behind the war we had been embroiled in and came to believe that we had been fighting to gain control of Angola's huge diamond deposits, oil fields, and other natural resources…but we had also been fighting to destabilise our African neighbours, and I didn't think this held any long-term advantages for South Africa.

Rumours abounded that senior members of the South African Army, some politicians, and even some private companies had become involved, not only in the lucrative illegal diamond trade but also in harvesting and selling precious Angolan hardwoods. Most despicable, though, was the extermination of vast elephant herds to cater for the illegal international ivory trade.

When London-born South African author Peter Stiff[25] questioned a senior Military Intelligence officer about the involvement of the SADF with ivory and precious woods, the reply he got was: "Look, we didn't give a shit. Why should we have? They weren't South African elephants and the hardwoods weren't South African hardwoods!"

We were young, and we were soldiers—and there was a war raging in Angola. What more could we have asked for?

Operation Protea was a large-scale SADF incursion into Angola to attack and destroy numerous of SWAPO's PLAN bases (photo: Tumblr.com)

02:
Ambush at Cahama

32 Battalion's companies were continually engaged in operations throughout southern Angola. Known by the enemy as Os Terrivies (the Terrible Ones), the unit found itself fighting frequent actions against FAPLA, PLAN, and at times the Cuban and Russian forces assisting the Angolan Army. As an infantry unit, 32 Battalion consistently outfought and outmanoeuvred those opposing forces, and became a headache that neither the Soviets nor their East German colleagues could find a cure for.

Sometimes operating with the companies and at other times operating independently, the Reconnaissance Wing's tasks included locating enemy positions and bases, gathering intelligence, conducting snatch operations, raids, and ambushes, and generally confusing and killing the enemy. Despite being a very small unit at that stage, the Wing was very successful at what it did.

Members of 32 Battalion found themselves in continuous operations in Angola (photo: fleche.co.za)

In early 1981, after a short respite, we were once again thrown into operations deep inside Angola. We had just conducted the reconnaissance of a FAPLA base at Ionde, after which we led the Battalion in to capture and secure the airfield for upcoming area operations against FAPLA and PLAN. We were later joined by elements of 61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion Group and paratroopers from 1 Parachute Battalion who were preparing to launch raids to the north of Ionde.

True to his nature, and despite our exhaustion, Willem would not allow us to rest on our laurels. As small as the Reconnaissance Wing was, he took us out on PLAN or FAPLA locate-and-kill missions, determined that the Wing should play its role in stabilising the

area. Our lack of numbers was made up for by the massive firepower we could bring to bear on any threat we faced.

Willem, with his perverse sense of humour, decided on one such mission that I would be his radio operator. Loaded like a pack donkey, and carrying my normal combat equipment along with an M79 grenade launcher, twenty M203 bombs,[26] the bulky (and heavy) HF[27] radio, my VHF[28] radio, and five bunker bombs, I was barely able to walk. But someone had to carry the load, and that happened to be me.

During one of the firefights we engaged in, I was so heavily laden with ammunition and equipment that I could no longer keep up with the assault as the Wing fought its way through a small PLAN base. I staggered my way across the objective, firing at targets that showed themselves, and then in a state of near collapse, hunched over to catch my breath and change magazines on my AK-47. The rest of the team, meanwhile, continued their assault through the enemy base. I could hear sporadic gunfire as they reached the limit of exploitation. A few seconds later, I heard the clattering of an Alouette gunship overhead, and the pilot telling Willem that they had spotted a 'hostile' who wasn't moving.

"If he moves, we are going to blow him away," I heard the pilot saying on the VHF.

'Good—I hope he doesn't move,' I thought to myself, 'at least we will have one prisoner to interrogate.'

"Don't shoot him," Willem responded, echoing my thoughts, "we need to interrogate him and find out what else is in the area."

I recall thinking the 'hostile' had to be quite close to where I was still hunched over—until I looked up. The gunship was circling above, its ominous 20mm gun unwaveringly trained on me. Due to the heavy load I was carrying and the manner in which the VHF radio had been strapped to my back, I couldn't reach the handset. As I was blackened-up with camouflage cream and wearing an enemy uniform, the gunship had no way of knowing that I was indeed an SADF 'paleface'.[29] I realised, from what the pilot had said to Willem, that he was waiting for me to make a move so he could shoot me. I knew that if I even wet my pants, he would construe that as a hostile move and rip me to pieces with his 20mm cannon.

I dropped my AK-47, very slowly raised my hands, and surrendered.

"The fucker has surrendered to us," I heard the pilot telling Willem as he guided the Wing towards the position of the 'hostile'. Meanwhile, he kept circling, probably hoping the 'hostile' was going to try and make a run for it.

When Willem and the rest of the team emerged from the bush, they burst out laughing at my predicament. Standing in the centre of a clearing with a few enemy bodies scattered around me, I was holding my hands high and scarcely breathing. My exhaustion had evaporated rapidly now that there was a gunship overhead intending to kill me if I moved.

"It's okay," Willem said to the pilot, still laughing, "he is one of ours." "Pity," the pilot responded, and flew off.

Fortunately, Peter Williams felt sorry for me and volunteered to take over the weighty HF radio. Despite protesting mildly—mainly in an effort to preserve my ego—I was

extremely grateful to be relieved of the damn thing. I was even more grateful that we were airlifted back to Ionde instead of having to plod our way back.

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After a few days' rest, we were tasked to locate and reconnoitre a suitable Helicopter Administrative Area (known by its Afrikaans acronym 'HAG' for Helikopter Admin Gebied) from where the battalion would be able to launch further operations against PLAN and FAPLA. The area identified by Commandant Deon Ferreira and the battalion's intelligence officer, Captain Ockert Swanepoel, as being suitable for the HAG was close to Peu Peu, more than 100 kilometres away to the east and on the banks of the Cunene River. Willem decided that instead of being inserted by helicopter, we would walk there through enemy territory carrying food, water, ammunition, and all our equipment on our backs.

"We're all knackered," I told Willem. "This bloody march of yours will kill us all… look at the guys, you can see how stuffed they are—and that includes you."

"So what?" Willem replied. "We are soldiers. We have orders to get there and secure a suitable HAG and that's what we're going to do."

"I think Falcon should at least have given us a few more days' rest," mumbled Staff Sergeant Phil Cairns. Falcon was Commandant Ferreira's radio call-sign and we usually referred to him by that name.

"Cut the cackle and pack up your kit," said Willem. "Falcon says he wants us there in seven days."

We knew it wouldn't be worthwhile arguing with him. Weary and despondent, we started making preparations for the long march.

Laden with ammunition, water, and rations, we staggered out of Ionde and began our gruelling trek towards the Cunene River. There was no hope of air support or resupply if we found ourselves in trouble.

Two days out from Ionde we came across a Volvo diesel bowser concealed in a clump of trees. Willem tasked me to check this 'gift from the Swedish People to their friends in Angola' and ensure it was free of booby traps. Once I was satisfied it was clear, Willem told Mark Craig to see what repairs were needed to get the vehicle back on the road again. Sapper Sergeant Mark Craig[30] was a big, bearded man who had seen action in Rhodesia during its terrorist war and he had the technical expertise to get the vehicle going. As the bowser was still half full of diesel, fuel wouldn't be a problem.

Mark worked his magic and a few hours later we were able to continue our journey. The bowser was painted blue and yellow so we promptly dubbed it the 'Yellow Submarine'. Its bright colours made it a highly visible target but we were too tired to care. Willem's decision to let us drive rather than march through the Angolan bush lifted our spirits considerably and we grew to love our Yellow Submarine in the days that followed. Two men sat in the cab driving and navigating our route while the rest of the team perched precariously on top of the diesel tank as we bundu- bashed[31] our way towards Peu Peu.

We reached our target area in record time and reported our arrival to Falcon by radio. When he learnt how we had done it, he was highly amused.

Willem Ratte was the best mentor I could ever have had. Despite personal differences later, I always held him in high esteem (photo: netwerk24)

We established a concealed lying-up place on the western bank of the Cunene River and waited for the battalion's advance party to arrive. Prior to their arrival, Willem sent a four-man team under my command to reconnoitre the lie of the land and to establish whether there was an enemy presence at Xai-Xai—a small town with an old Portuguese military prison approximately ten kilometres to our north. Willem also tasked me to confirm that the position of the HAG he had selected from studying aerial photographs was suitable and in the best possible location. He debriefed me on our return.

"Any signs of enemy activity at Xai-Xai?" he asked.

"Nothing. We saw a few unarmed locals walking around, but they didn't see us." "Any indications of recent vehicular activity in the area?"

"Negative to that," I responded.

He questioned me in the minutest detail for what felt like hours, and then ended by asking what I thought of his choice for the HAG. This was typical Willem— continually

teaching, questioning, and probing, to see if I was still focussed and thinking like a soldier. It didn't matter how tired I was.

I told him I thought it was ideally located: The area around it could be easily defended, there was good water and easy access, there were suitable areas for helicopter landing zones, ammunition storage, and vehicle stands, and most importantly, it could be well camouflaged. Critically, if the rains came it would not get flooded.

"Okay," said Willem, "get on the radio. Advise Falcon that you have located a suitable HAG and that we are awaiting his arrival."

The next few days were spent cleaning and checking weapons, conducting small reconnaissance patrols around the area, bathing in the Cunene River, and generally making ourselves comfortable and getting some much needed rest.

By the time the battalion's advance party arrived we were well rested and ready to get back into action. Over the next couple of days the remainder of the battalion was airlifted in and deployed into defensive positions around the HAG. The Reconnaissance Wing remained on the far side of the Cunene River to act as an early warning post. Every day we waded to the HQ through a chest-deep 100 metre stretch of river to receive a daily briefing from Ockert, the battalion's intelligence officer, and orders from Falcon. The thought that we might become lunch for some of the many crocodiles lurking in the river never crossed our minds. Perhaps they had realised we would not be very tasty; we were little more than skin and bones dressed in filthy rags.

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A few days later Willem returned to South Africa to get married, leaving me in command of the Reconnaissance Wing. We were somewhat surprised by the wedding announcement as we had never thought of Willem as anything other than a soldier. Discovering that he had a romantic side, and thinking of him as a husband, gave us a good chuckle.

Taking command of the wing left me feeling very concerned that I wouldn't be big enough to fill his boots.

A few days later I was called to the battalion's operations centre to be briefed by Falcon and Ockert.

"You ought to feel proud of yourself," said Falcon, "Willem has never entrusted the Reconnaissance Wing to anyone before. The Wing is the Battalion's eyes and ears, and sometimes its bite where the enemy least expects it," he told me, "commanding it is a huge responsibility."

"I realise that, sir. I only hope I don't disappoint Willem or the men."

"I'm sure you'll do just fine; Willem wouldn't have left a fool in charge," he said, "anyway, I didn't call you here to polish your marble. There's work to be done."

Falcon tasked us to locate a road that was believed to be the link between two Angolan army garrisons: Cahama and Mulondo. He believed that this road, if it's location remained unknown, could be used to rush reinforcements to Cahama, and if that garrison was

attacked by the battalion, FAPLA would be able to saturate the surrounding area with reinforcements from Mulondo at short notice.

Cahama was the garrison for FAPLA's 16 Brigade. It was obvious that Falcon was planning to conduct operations within Cahama's area's of responsibility and influence and, therefore, locating the road was vitally important to his planning.

I did my appreciation of the situation, assessed my options, developed my plan, and discussed it with Falcon. He accepted it after listening carefully and asking some questions regarding matters of war. I then issued orders to my men. I had decided that for once, we would be using vehicles and would not have to cover the distance on foot. If the men weren't relieved at this news, I certainly was.

Filled with some apprehension, I led the Reconnaissance Wing out of Peu-Peu in two Buffels loaded with enough weapons and ammunition to give my small group maximum firepower. Additionally, we carried our food and water in the backs of the two MPVs as we headed north. I knew that the armour-plating on the Buffels would give us some protection from small-arms fire, but if we drove into an ambush in which RPG-7s or anti-aircraft weapons were used in a ground-fire role we would stand no chance at all. The rockets and large-calibre rounds would slice through the plating.

After we had passed the outer edge of the battalion HQ's perimeter manned by the 32 Battalion companies, a team of two men debussed from the Buffels, taking point on foot. Their task was to navigate the compass bearing I had determined, hopefully intersecting the elusive road between Cahama and Mulondo. They would also be the first to locate any fresh enemy tracks we crossed, the first to enter any ambush killing ground, and possibly the first to be cut down by FAPLA or PLAN. The remainder of the Wing stayed on-board the vehicles, resting and waiting to rotate with the point men.

The drivers of the MPVs were not members of the Reconnaissance Wing; they had been drawn from the battalion.

The point team remained in VHF radio contact with the MPVs which silently followed in their tracks. Skilful driving made the powerful diesel engines virtually inaudible over a distance of twenty metres. Moving twenty to 50m ahead—depending on the bush—the team would rely on us if it came under enemy fire. In that instance the Buffels would race forward and assault the enemy position, regardless of its strength.

Moving cross-country, we silently made our way towards the suspected reconnaissance area, cutting deep tracks in the soft soil. We were keenly aware that if the enemy saw these tracks they would be alerted to our presence in the area as the Buffels broke their way through the dense vegetation.

That night we made a small temporary base (TB) and positioned ourselves in all-round defence. It was impossible for us to move at night with men ahead of the vehicles as we could not use the vehicle lights without betraying our presence to the enemy. The noise of the vehicles would also travel further at night than it did in the day.

After two days of bashing our way through the bush, and shortly before last light, we finally found the road we were looking for. It was a small dirt track, suitably camouflaged, and protected from air reconnaissance by vegetation. A brief inspection showed that several heavy vehicles had very recently used it.

As was so often the case, a lack of precise maps or aerial photographs prevented us from determining an accurate fix on our position. I did, however, know that the enemy lay to our north, east, and west, and our battalion to our south, with the Cunene River shielding the battalion's north-western flank. I had a good idea of where we were although I suspected some of the team members were very sure I had no idea of our actual position. I guessed we were probably about twenty kilometres to the east of Cahama and therefore FAPLA's 16 Brigade posed no immediate or direct threat. It was what possibly lay around us that concerned me most.

Rather than withdrawing, I decided we would wait and see what came along.

I silently positioned the Buffels approximately twenty metres into the dense bush with their machine guns laid to give maximum fire onto the concealed road.

Five of us waited patiently about 50m away from the vehicles but very close to the road, so that we could deliver cross-fire if the enemy came by. The drivers and signallers waited at the vehicles.

I also used this time to tap out a brief Morse message advising Falcon that we had found the road. He was pleased to receive the situation report and instructed me to withdraw as he could now confirm the road's existence to the air force.

I, on the other hand, felt it would be worth our while to wait and see what came along. I did not tell Falcon this—instead I sent back a message to say that our reception was very poor and that I could not hear him. I had learnt this 'trick' from Willem Ratte who once told me that the man on the ground, and not the man at the HQ, was in the ideal position to make tactical decisions.

Willem had also taught me that when contact with the enemy seemed imminent, it was better to hit them hard on our terms instead of leaving the initiative to them. That made perfect sense to me as I had already learnt what a devastating force multiplier surprise can be.

We didn't have long to wait.Several minutes before night fell we heard a single truck approaching our position.

It was following the road we had located, and driving very slowly. I signalled to Mark Craig (who was manning one of the Buffel-mounted machine guns) to stand-by.

As the GAZ-66[32] came within about ten metres of our ground positions, we stood up in the long grass and opened fire.

Simultaneously, Mark opened fire with the machine gun, catching the enemy vehicle in a deadly cross-fire. Our tracers ripped into the vehicle and its occupants.

The vehicle ground to a halt. The driver and his passenger slumped in the front seats, dead. Immediately, we assaulted the stationary GAZ on foot, still firing at the enemy troops who had been caught on its back. Taken completely by surprise, they didn't even have time to fire their weapons before our green tracer rounds tore into and through them. I signalled to Mark to cease firing and we approached cautiously.

In the fading light, we counted several blood-stained bodies on the back of, and lying next to, the destroyed vehicle. Several of their uniforms were smouldering from the ferocity of the attack. One wounded enemy soldier lay hidden in the long grass, and in the

dusk, I did not see him lifting his pistol to put a bullet through me. Corporal Lopez saw him, and immediately jumped in front of me, shielding me and finishing him off with his PKM machine gun.

Then all was quiet.

The entire action had lasted no longer than twenty seconds. The destroyed vehicle was carrying several SAM-7[33] shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, a radio, and sufficient ammunition for us to replenish our expended AK-47 and PKM ammunition. These we quickly transferred to the Buffels. It was only then that one of the men indicated to me that he had been wounded in the leg. No one knew how it had happened.

Cliffy, our 'tame'[34] American medic quickly tended to the wounded man and advised me to have him casevaced as quickly as possible. Suddenly, we heard a large number of vehicles starting up about 100m from our position. They were hidden by the dense bush so we had no idea what size this enemy force was; we hadn't even known they were there. There was no time to call for a casevac. I assumed we had entered a hornet's nest and FAPLA were most probably about to come and find out what had happened so close to their base—a base we knew nothing about. My only option was to move south—quickly—and find a suitable area for the helicopters to casevac the wounded man. We quickly mounted the Buffels and left the area, not wanting to find ourselves outnumbered by FAPLA.

About two hours later, we were forced to stop. Cliffy was concerned about the wounded man's worsening condition and told me we needed to have him casevaced by helicopter as soon as possible. We shut down the engines of the Buffels and listened. We couldn't hear any FAPLA pursuit vehicles and I assumed the fall of night and the approaching rain storm had compelled them to stop or turn back.

I quickly established communications with the battalion HQ and called for an immediate casevac. Ferreira was furious with me for having disregarded his orders,

Author whilst serving as second-in- command, 32 Bn Reconnaissance Wing – 1982

orders I claimed I hadn't heard due to bad reception. He suspected I was lying to him and told me he was going to skin my arse when he saw me again, but he nevertheless agreed to send the casevac. After all, we both agreed, it wasn't the wounded man's fault that he needed to be extracted. Ferreira additionally told me that the battalion HQ was relocating its position to Xangongo, approximately 30km south-west of Peu-Peu.

With a sizeable Angolan thunderstorm about to break, we took up positions around the designated LZ for the casevac which would take more than an hour to reach us. FAPLA still posed a significant danger and I instructed everyone that we would mount the Buffels and travel south for an hour once the casevac had left, in case FAPLA were able to take a fix on the LZ and pound us with mortars. Only then would we move into a hide for the night.

An anxious 50-minutes later, my VHF crackled. "EB (Echo Bravo), this is Giant, do you copy?"

'Echo Bravo' was my radio call-sign. 'Giant' was the call sign used by the Puma helicopters.

"Giant, EB, go," I responded.

"Give me a grid," the pilot requested, trying to find us in the now very imminent storm.

"Sorry Giant, I have no fucking idea where we are. Enemy on our tails. We'll give you a strobe," I said.

"I copy that, give it to me, I will look for it," he responded.

Cliffy had, in the meantime, prepared the wounded man for casevac, and a stretcher party, under guidance of Kevin Sydow and Phil Smith, sat waiting for the chopper to touch down. Then the rain came down with a vengeance. Within seconds, we were soaked to the bone.

Jim Savoury flicked on his strobe light and the flash momentarily blinded us. After several minutes of sitting in the pouring rain with the strobe light flashing, we finally heard the rotors of the helicopter slashing through the air. Using the noise of the helicopter, I was able to guide the pilot in to our position. Finally, I heard the pilot call me.

"EB, Giant, got your strobe."

As he came in to the LZ, lightning and thunder crashed around us. It was then that I saw we had probably chosen the smallest LZ in Angola for the casevac. The pilot's comments mirrored my thoughts.

"Jesus, couldn't you find a tighter LZ?" he asked, clearly agitated at the small area he was required to manoeuvre his large helicopter into—in pitch darkness with a massive thunderstorm and downpour raging.

"Sorry," I said meekly. I already felt bad about the wounded man. I didn't need a nameless helicopter pilot to rub my nose in it.

The pilot brought his helicopter into the LZ, its rotor blades slicing through the branches in its path. Then the pilot switched on his powerful landing lights. I was again blinded by the light and buffeted by the rotor downwash. The stretcher party rushed towards the gaping doors of the Puma and before it could touch the ground, our casualty was loaded into its belly and safely into the hands of the on-board medics.

"Thanks, Giant," I said to the pilot as he pulled out of the LZ.

"You're welcome, EB. Next time find me a better LZ. Now I need to get back to the HAG for a hot meal and a drink," he responded with a chuckle.

"Fuck you very much," I responded as the pilot flew off into the darkness.

Seconds later, he was gone and the Puma's engines were drowned out by the sound of the storm. We silently mounted the Buffels and I pointed our little convoy south, before FAPLA could get a fix on our position. Their anticipated mortar bombardment never came.

At around 01:00 the next morning the storm finally let up and I gave the order for us to enter a small TB position and get some sleep. We were all exhausted and drenched and we had not heard any FAPLA vehicles for several hours so I assumed we were reasonably safe.

At around 05:00, my signaller woke me with his finger on his lips to show me to keep quiet. He cupped his ear in the direction we had come from. I listened and heard the far-off drone of FAPLA pursuit vehicles.

"Mount up, they're coming," I ordered.

Seconds later we were on our way again, with FAPLA in hot pursuit. Our drivers gunned the engines and we clung desperately to the back of our Buffels as they bashed

their way through trees and undergrowth. Gradually, we gained the advantage and I realised we had a perfect opportunity to lay an ambush, shoot out as many of their vehicles as we could to win more time, and then make our way south again. We just needed a suitable position.

As we burst through the dense bush into a clearing, a group of Angolan civilians from a village in our path started running away from us. Sensing that they must be hiding something, I had the oldest tribesman brought over to me. After we gave him some of our rations, he was keen to point out that a 'large group' of PLAN lay to our immediate front, straddling our path back to the battalion HQ, which by now, lay just north of Xangongo, but on the south-eastern bank of the Cunene River. He also had a note with him, from the PLAN commander of a base nearby; addressed to the FAPLA commander of a garrison (who I could only assume was the enemy commander following us). I decided to abandon the ambush idea and rather clear the PLAN base to our front.

I quickly discussed this with my team and gave them my initial orders: I would lead the entire reconnaissance team I had with me—eight of us in total—on foot and launch a surprise attack on the PLAN base. The Buffels would follow a tactical bound behind us for fire support should we need them. I would remain in contact with Mark Craig who was manning the machine gun on one of the Buffels. As FAPLA was now closing the gap on us, we needed to move fast. The Buffels would, additionally, act as our rear-guard and delay the FAPLA pursuit. The tribesman showed no hesitation in leading us to where PLAN were holed up.

On the outer edge of a dry riverbed hidden by dense bush, the tribesman pointed me in the direction of the PLAN camp. I saw five enemy soldiers washing themselves near a waterhole close to the opposite side of the riverbed. Many of the smaller rivers were still dry despite the rainy season having started, and the enemy, civilians, and us, all made use of waterholes dug into the dry river beds. These were often our (and their) only source of water.

Several civilians sat near the waterhole, obviously having been coerced to carry water to the enemy troops when they needed it. I immediately made my assault plan and issued orders. Everyone was to hold their fire until I initiated the contact.

Seconds later, we formed up in an extended line and walked straight across the riverbed directly towards the bathing PLAN members and their camp. We were totally exposed crossing the dry river. I hoped our varied uniforms, similar weapons, and blackened faces would give us an element of surprise if we were to fight our way through the PLAN force that lay to our front.

As Colonel Jan Breytenbach[35] would later recount:

Eeben… (formed up) his men in extended line and they slowly advanced. The faces and hands of the white team members had been blackened with Black is Beautiful (camouflage cream) and they were all wearing SWAPO[36] camouflage, so they looked like any other SWAPO. The odds of about 100 to eight were hardly favourable, but they had the element of surprise and enormous firepower for so small a party. Five of them had light machine

guns and two had M79 grenade launchers as well as AK-47s. But it was still eight against 100!

Feeling as though everyone in Angola was watching us, we quietly, but rather confidently, advanced across the open riverbed. With a finger to his lips, Phil Cairns trained his RPD machine gun onto the civilians sitting around the waterhole as a sign for them not to warn the enemy or move—they didn't. The PLAN troops glanced up at us, waved, and continued washing and talking, not realising that we were definitely not approaching them to befriend them.

When we were about three metres away, one of the enemy casually glanced in my direction. I saw his eyes widen in shock and horror as it dawned on him who we were and what was about to happen. I initiated the assault by cutting him down before switching my fire to the other bathers. They were quickly killed by our heavy firepower. One of them tried to escape across the dry riverbed but Cliffy took him down with a well-placed M79 grenade.

Assuming that we had now lost the element of surprise, Sergeants Phil Smith and Kevin Sydow immediately led the assault into the bush where the PLAN base was while I called the Buffels on my VHF radio and told them to join us as fast as possible.

"Where the fuck are you, boss?" Mark asked. "Where the fucking shooting is," I replied.

By now, the very one-sided firefight was growing intense as Phil and the rest of the team crashed through the dense bush and swept into PLAN's base area, cutting down anyone they found in their path.

The PLAN troops, caught completely by surprise, didn't hold their ground or even attempt to resist the assault. Instead, they turned and fled into the bush, their hasty retreat followed by sustained and accurate fire from my men. Two of them came bursting through the bush close to where I was talking to Mark on the radio. I quickly shot them. What felt like seconds later, the team rejoined me.

"Boss, they're running. We got a couple of them but there is a shit-house full of medical equipment and rations in there," Phil said, pointing in the direction of the PLAN base. "Kevin is burning the stuff now but I think we'd better get going— fucking quickly, if I may say so."

The PLAN base was littered with their dead and dying. The large stockpile of equipment, much of it 'a gift from your friends in Norway', was a clear indication that they had a much larger force than we had anticipated. Surprise had indeed been our friend.

In the distance, we heard some of their vehicles starting up as they hurriedly tried to flee the area. We could not, however, waste any time clearing the base as we would have liked to.

As the Buffels burst onto the riverbed, Mark's eyes signalled what Phil Smith had just suggested to me.

"Boss," he shouted above the din of the engines, "FAPLA are almost right behind us. I think we'd better get the hell out of here."

I agreed.

Seconds later, we were back on board the Buffels, heading south for Xangongo.

For some strange reason, FAPLA never followed us beyond the PLAN base. We could only assume that they were trying to restore some order in the scattered and panicked PLAN ranks.

We reached the Cunene River shortly before last light. In the distance, we could see the outposts of the battalion's defensive positions signalling for us to hurry across. Unfortunately for us, Ferreira had left the tactical HQ and been airlifted to Rundu, leaving it under the command of Chris Clay, an American captain who many of us suspected of having divided loyalties. Clay told me rather off-handedly to make my own way across the river—a crocodile-infested, swirling brown mass of water approximately 200 metres wide at that point. As there was no bridge, I asked him how the hell I was supposed to do that. Falcon would have kept a security force at a known crossing point and guided us there, allowing us to make good our escape. He would never have expected us to leave behind two vehicles for the enemy, and cross the river without any support.

The only suitable crossing-point I knew of lay approximately twenty kilometres upstream at Peu-Peu. To get there, we would have had to drive through an area, at night, that either PLAN or FAPLA had re-occupied.

His response was, "That's your problem." I was furious.

I told him to go and fuck himself. I was, however, not willing to leave our two Buffels behind on the enemy-side of the river for FAPLA or PLAN to use against us later, so we put our heads together, hurriedly collected sufficient pieces of steel and wood lying around from a destroyed bridge and, under Mark's supervision, built a pontoon that even the School of Engineers would have been

14 Every man carried his own medical supplies which would be used to treat him if he was wounded

proud of. Cautiously, our drivers manoeuvred the Buffels onto our improvised pontoon and, one at a time, we floated them across the wide Cunene River.[37]

It was well after dark when we finally landed the two Buffels on the opposite side of the Cunene River and wearily made our way to the Tac HQ where I was debriefed by Ockert Swanepoel. He, in turn, informed me that our casualty had been evacuated to the Oshakati field hospital in northern South West Africa, for further medical treatment.

Later that night, we bedded down.

Despite our exhaustion, we were elated. In the space of a few days, we had located the road Falcon needed to find. We had, additionally, made contact with FAPLA, captured some surface-to-air missiles, destroyed a FAPLA vehicle, and killed several FAPLA troops. A day later, our small team had over-run a large PLAN base, killed several of their troops, and destroyed part of PLAN's supply dump. Furthermore, we had built a pontoon and brought our two vehicles safely across the river with us, something several of the battalion's platoon commanders considered a major feat.

I had more reason to feel a sense of pride. My men had unquestioningly obeyed every order I had given. Not once had they questioned my decisions or showed any signs of apprehension. They had placed their trust in me and I felt I had not let them—or Willem—down.

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After a short respite, we were once again thrown into operations. Of the many actions we took part in, one was particularly significant to me: It taught me the essence of leadership under fire, the value of surprise, the importance of night operations, and most significantly, the need for intense training and team work— traits I would be able to utilise and exploit later during my life.

When Falcon[38] returned to the HAG, he again called me over to the battalion HQ for a briefing. He and Ockert were waiting for me. Before the briefing began, Falcon told me he believed I had deliberately disobeyed his orders during our previous mission and asked me to substantiate the excuse I had used about bad radio communications. He also made it very clear that he had not believed me. When I once more stammered my way through my previous explanation he just stared at me, not uttering a single word. Then he smiled at me.

"Don't ever do that again sapper—if you do, I will rip your head off," he said and then added, "Well done to you all."

I was suitably relieved when Ockert began his briefing.

"We have confirmed that the road between Cahama and Chicusse is being used to move a lot of recently arrived military equipment," he said. "We don't know where the equipment has come from, what it is, or how it will be used. I want you to find that out—and destroy some of it if possible. FAPLA's 16 Brigade is currently based at Cahama and we have no intelligence on what they are planning."

"This mission is vitally important," said Falcon. "It's not easy for me to tell you"

Commandant Deon Ferreira, the commander of 32 Battalion during the author's period of service there. As a commanding officer, he was highly respected. He later became a lieutenant general and passed away in 2002 (photo: http://www.veridical.co.za)

that your team might not make it back alive—or even dead. But if things go wrong I'll do everything in my power to get you out."

I nodded dutifully. I liked and respected Falcon and I knew that he would move mountains to get us out of trouble if it came to that. Willem had often told me that I could trust Falcon always to keep his word.

Despite that, my stomach was rapidly sinking towards my boots.

"This is to be a fairly quick infiltration," he continued. "Do your reconnaissance, hit the road, destroy whatever you can, and then get out. I'll have some Impalas or Mirages on standby to provide close air support if you need it. You can be certain the area will be swarming with FAPLA troops and they won't exactly be keen to have you around. If they are alerted to your presence it will become very unpleasant out there."

He gave me two days to prepare my plan and ready the team. I spent the rest of that day studying aerial photographs of the area, speaking to Ockert, making an appreciation of the situation, and preparing my plan. I tried to look and sound as confident as possible when I gave my men their orders. I didn't tell them about Falcon's concerns as I didn't want to unduly alarm them. We spent a lot of time rehearsing our infiltration and exfiltration, the

setting-up of automatic mine ambushes, anti-tracking actions, and emergency drills. Weapons were checked and rechecked.

Finally we were ready to go.

I reported to Falcon and told him we were ready for deployment at approximately 13:00 on my D-day.

"Take care and good luck," he said, and shook my hand.

I forced a smile and left to give my team their final briefing and orders. I was feeling considerably apprehensive as I ordered my men to kit up and recheck their weapons. All the whites in the team were to blacken their faces with the Black is Beautiful camouflage cream that the army provided. This horrible cream was used daily on operations and years later some of us would still have it oozing from our pores. The black members of our team always had a good laugh at the dramatic change we underwent in order to look like them.

I had a final word with the gunship pilots who would be escorting the Puma helicopter in which we would be deploying. In addition to providing top-cover for he Puma, their task would be to locate the landing zone I had chosen from the aerial photographs and reconnoitre it from the air. If they found any signs of enemy activity or if they drew ground fire, they would put down suppressing fire and deviate to an alternate landing zone I had selected. It was imperative to do our approach run into the target area as quickly and unobtrusively as possible. Our lives would depend on it.

I then spoke to the Puma pilots and they confirmed that other Pumas would be conducting dummy drops in the area to confuse the enemy. Hopefully this deception would help us to melt into the bush undetected once we were on the ground. The approach of nightfall would also make it easier for us to move to the section of road where I planned to conduct surveillance and spring an ambush. It was mid- afternoon when, laden with ammunition and landmines, we finally shuffled out to the makeshift helipad and got our mission under way.

Like a giant firefly, the single Puma thundered across the Angolan skyline barely above treetop level, and headed north with us in its belly. Eventually it would be guided toward the LZ located by the Alouette gunships. Two additional Pumas also headed out to commence their dummy drops away from the area we would deploy into.

Each man was weighed down with ten AK-47 magazines, each loaded with 30 rounds and an additional magazine on the rifle. Our magazines were loaded in a two- ball-one tracer sequence with five final tracer rounds. This would allow us, especially at night, to deliver accurate fire and start brush fires in the dry bush. It would also alert us when our magazines were nearly empty. In addition, two men carried M79 grenade launchers, and another two had either an RPD or a PKM machine gun and 300 rounds of ammunition each. Every team member carried an extra ammunition belt for the RPD or the PKM. An RPG-7 rocket launcher with three rockets was also part of our arsenal. A few of us carried pre-fragmentation grenades and white phosphorous grenades—'just in case'.

Between us we also carried three TMA-3 anti-tank landmines, a detonating cord ringmain, and a pull switch rigged for an automatic mine ambush. We had our medical shock packs,[14][39] and water and rations for 48 hours. Our VHF radio for tactical ground-to-

air communications was strapped to my back and my night-vision goggles were tied to my chest. Another man hauled the bulky HF radio that was our rearlink to the battalion HQ at the HAG.

The Pumas lifted off. With weapons at the ready, we sat in the open door, legs dangling in the wind, waiting to exit the helicopter and hit the ground to kick off our mission. Each man was busy with his own thoughts as we were hostage to a loud and noisy target if the enemy chose to fire on it. We were dressed in a combination of Soviet, Cuban, and East German camouflage uniforms. Our weapons were all ex- Communist-Bloc so we would be able to resupply ammunition by foraging off the enemy dead as we had done in the past. Using the opposition's weapons behind enemy lines also gave us another advantage: the enemy could mistakenly interpret our gunfire as that of their own forces.

Normally we operated in small, highly mobile four-man teams, but this was not simply a reconnaissance mission. Our task was to locate a target, spring an ambush, destroy whatever equipment we could, kill as many enemy troops as we could, and cause as much havoc as possible.

After what seemed like several hours of flying, we felt the pilot throttling back and the flight engineer signalled to let us know we were approaching the LZ. I was unable to hear the gunship pilot's radio cackling above the flapping noise of the rotors and the wind, but it was safe to assume the LZ was clear.

One of my men tapped me on my shoulder and pointed at the flight engineer who was urgently indicating that we were only seconds away from our LZ. The pilots were by then solely focused on bringing us in to the LZ and they began their procedure

The unofficial 32 Battalion Reconnaissance Wing insignia

of powering down and landing from a barely perceptible hover. The flight engineer gave us the signal to stand-by to exit.

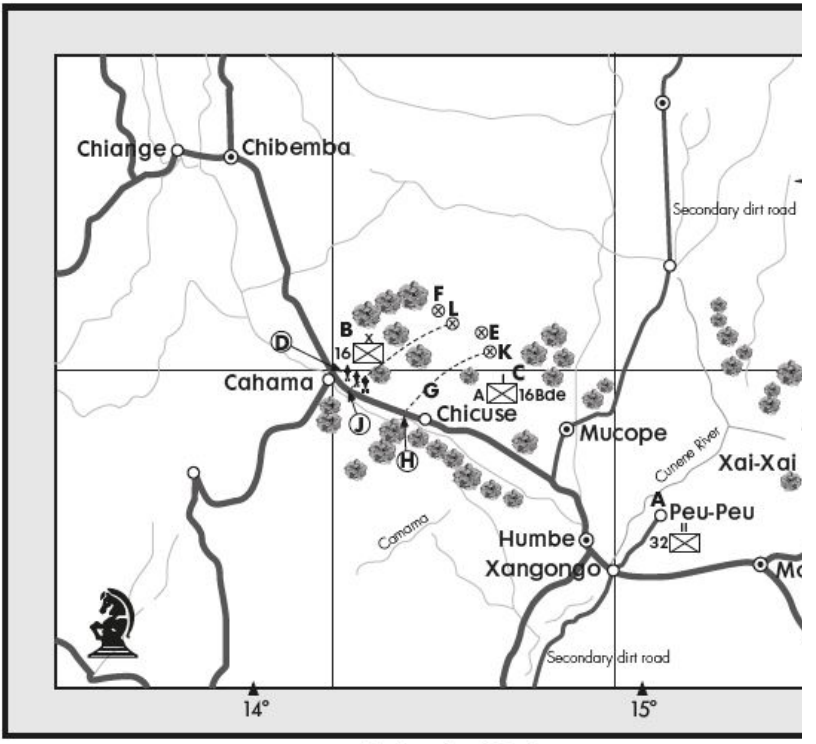
I felt my stomach contract as the butterflies woke up. It was always the same when we deployed. I positively hated LZs, as I'm sure most of my team did, although none of us would ever have admitted it.

Everything became instinctive as the ground rushed up to meet us. The flight engineer gave the exit signal and we leapt from the belly of the Puma, moving rapidly into all-round defensive positions, peering through the deepening darkness and scanning the shadowy gloom of the bush with weapons at the ready.

The Puma's engines roared and it clattered back into the air, the sand from its rotor wash stinging our faces and hands. Within a matter of seconds it was swallowed up by the Angolan night, leaving us alone and deep behind enemy lines.

I called the gunship pilot, Captain Arthur Walker, on my VHF radio. Arthur was an aviator who would fly through hell to help us if we needed him. He was the only South African who had been decorated with two Honoris Crux Gold medals— South Africa's highest award and the equivalent of the British Victoria Cross—for exceptional bravery in the face of the enemy.

"Gunship, this is Echo Bravo (EB)."



Ambush at Cahama

A - 32Bn helicopter admin area
B - 16 Infantry brigade
C - Company A, 16th brigade

D - Bde mortar positions
E - Recce group's planned LZ
F - Recce group's actual LZ
G - Planned exfiltration route
H - Planned ambush site
J - Actual ambush site
K - Planned extraction point
L - Actual extraction point

"EB, go," Arthur's voice crackled back. "Confirm our LZ," I said."Okay, EB, I'm not too sure but I guess we're about as close as we can get to where you wanted to be. I'm afraid everything looks the damn same from up here."

Once again we lacked accurate maps of the area we were working in, which always presented a problem. Aerial photographs, especially old ones like those we were using, had many limitations.

"Roger. Copy that," I signed off.

The rotors of the gunships faded into the distance. The sudden silence was deafening.

My men were still in all-round defence and waiting for my orders. Without a word I took a compass bearing towards the intended target area and started moving out. The men rose quietly from the shadows and slipped into a single-file formation behind me. We had conducted this type of operation several times before and every man knew what to do. With rounds chambered and fingers on triggers, we slowly and silently moved towards our objective.

The dense, thorny bush caught at our uniforms, tugging and tearing as we strained under the weight of our heavy loads. Not a word was spoken as we made our approach to the target area. Every patch of bush held its own potential dangers and we silently and methodically cleared our path as we moved forward.

We stopped for our first break after about two hours on the march. Drenched with sweat, we squatted in an all-round defensive position, ready to fight till the last if the need arose. Not a single word had been uttered since we had left the LZ.

I thought of the men in my team: Lieutenant Jim Savoury, an infantry officer who had served in the Wing longer than I had; Staff Sergeant Phil Cairns, a former member of the New Zealand SAS; Sergeant Phil Smith, a born and bred Englishman and a veteran in the Wing; Sergeant Robert 'Cliffy' Clifford, an American seeking adventure; Sergeant Kevin Sydow, a great NCO and another old hand in the Wing; Corporal Viera, an Angolan from the old FNLA who was fighting to liberate his country; Hiafeni, an ex-FAPLA man who had changed sides after being captured; Lance Corporal Alfonso, an Angolan from the old Bravo Group; and Lance Corporal Pedro, who had served with 32 Battalion since he was a teenager. They were all good men, great soldiers and thoroughly reliable. We had all been blooded in combat and would kill over and over again if called on to do so.

The responsibility of having them under my command was enormous. A single mistake on my part could result in the whole Wing being wiped out.

My thoughts were interrupted by the heavy rumbling of a large vehicle convoy about a kilometre to our west. We listened in silent amazement as it dawned on us that we had

been dropped off in the wrong place. According to my planning, we should still have been at least eight kilometres from the road those vehicles were travelling on.

Jim and Kevin quietly came over to me.

"What now, Boss?" whispered Jim. "Seems like we're in the wrong spot. Are we going to abort or do we look for another target?"

"Yeah, what do we do now?" Kevin asked. Night was falling quickly.

We all knew the implications of what we were hearing. I had planned the entire operation from compass bearings because of our lack of decent maps. Once our ambush had been successfully sprung, I had intended for us to exfiltrate from the killing ground to a predetermined LZ, working off a preplanned compass bearing. Being off-target posed dire implications for us if we needed a hot extraction; the Puma helicopters would look for us in the wrong place if we needed them urgently. Another problem was that if the need arose to call in an air strike, we wouldn't even know where we were. My mind raced through the options open to me and I finally made my decision.

"We'll go ahead. Falcon needs to know what's happening out here. Besides, we've carried all this bloody ammunition this far so we might as well use it up," I said.

"Okay, let's go and kick arse then," Kevin said, only his white teeth showing as he grinned in the darkness.

I switched on my night vision goggles and motioned for Hiafeni to come over to me. I told him in Portuguese that he and I would take the lead approximately ten metres ahead of the team. If we encountered enemy troops, he was to tell them that we were a Cuban reconnaissance team looking for battle indications from the South Africans. With luck, this would temporarily confuse the enemy and give us time to take whatever action was appropriate.

We hadn't gone more than 600 metres when we heard laughter in front of us. We stopped immediately, silently formed up in a skirmish line, and waited with ears straining. Travelling with lights switched off, another convoy approached from the south some distance to our front. We could see the trucks by their silhouettes from our position as they passed. It wasn't unusual for FAPLA convoys to travel without headlights at night as the lights were often hunted down and destroyed by Impala strike aircraft.[40] I thought the convoy might be moving from the small town of Chicusse towards Cahama, the home of FAPLA's 16 Brigade.

Then we heard someone out in front of us shouting greetings to, probably, troops on the backs of the vehicles. They responded loudly, laughing and shouting. There were fifteen vehicles in the convoy. We realised grimly that Falcon and Ockert must have possessed good intelligence to have worked out which road to send us to, even if we weren't on the correct spot.

My immediate concern was the voices on the ground, close to our front. Had the enemy deployed listening posts along the road?

"Jim, Kevin, I don't know what is up in front of us, but I don't want us walking into a fucking ambush. You stay here with the team. Hiafeni and I will check ahead. If firing

breaks out, take the team and get the hell out of here. If we are not killed or captured, we'll try to rejoin you at the LZ. If I don't make it one of you can have my Walkman."

"Be careful, Boss," was Kevin's whispered response.

About 100 metres beyond where we had left the team, I spotted movement ten metres to my front through the night vision goggles. With hearts thumping, Hiafeni and I silently inched our way forward, conscious that the slightest sound could betray our presence. We stopped and I studied the source of the movement. There was a five-man FAPLA 82mm mortar team deployed on the verge of the road. This was something I had not anticipated. It also meant that somewhere around us there were more mortar teams, mortar observation posts, a radio link to a larger body of soldiers, and probably infantry teams protecting the mortar teams.

Hiafeni and I withdrew and moved about 200 metres along the road to the north where we located another mortar team by the roadside. The hours I had spent studying aerial photographs of our selected ambush zone had revealed no indication of their presence. But that was to be expected. The photos were old and we weren't where I had planned to be.

In a sudden moment of madness, I decided to lay the ambush between the two mortar positions and hit whatever target presented itself.

Hiafeni and I slowly and quietly made our way back to the waiting team. I beckoned them to link up with me for an impromptu orders group.

"Okay, the road is about 100 metres to our front. There are two mortar positions right by the roadside, spaced about 200 metres apart. With darkness on our side, we can slip in between them and lay our ambush on the road. We'll hit whatever drives through, cause as much shit and mayhem as we can, and then get the hell out of here. Let's get going," I whispered.

There were a few grins in the darkness.

"This is going to be fun," whispered Phil Smith, "I just wonder who's going to get the bigger surprise when the first shots are fired; them or us."

"Maybe I should amble over to them and say that I'm here purely by accident. I'll tell them I'm on a package holiday trip to Africa from New Zealand for a spot of hunting," Phil Cairns joked.

Despite the banter, the men knew how much danger we were in. We were about to lay an ambush between two enemy mortar positions with no clue what else lay around us. For all we knew, there could have been hundreds of FAPLA troops in the dense bush. We would have the blackness of the African night and the element of surprise on our side but as Phil had joked, whose surprise would it be, theirs or ours?

We began our final infiltration to what I hoped would be a good ambush position. When we reached the edge of the tarred road we heard the sounds of another approaching convoy in the distance. It was the third convoy we had heard since arriving. Something big had to be up.

"Go!" I whispered, making a sudden decision.

Adrenalin kicked in with full force as the machine gunners emplaced their PKM and RPD machine guns on the flanks of our ambush position in the thick undergrowth, three metres from the verge of the road.

Kevin and Phil silently rushed on to the road and positioned our TMA-3 anti- tank mines. Cliffy followed behind, laying the detonating cord ringmain and slipping the detonators into position. I watched nervously through the night vision goggles as two large Ural trucks slowly approached our position. With no headlights to illuminate their path, they seemed to crawl through the darkness like giant beetles.

Kevin, Phil, and Cliffy were back in the ambush position within seconds. All I had to do was pull the switch when the first vehicle passed over the mines. We always laid our mines on the road surface during night operations instead of digging them in. We knew that the driver of a vehicle moving without headlights at night wouldn't have time to react, even if he saw something strange or suspicious on the road. We had perfected this ambush technique over a period of months and we were good at it.

As the heavily laden vehicle approached, someone shouted out to the truck-borne troops in Portuguese. The voice came from somewhere in the dark undergrowth to our right, but we never found out who it had been. The shout prompted the lead vehicle to slow down even more and the driver briefly flicked his headlights on. The three TMA-3 landmines, painted black, with the detonating cord ringmain coiled like a snake about to strike, lay on the road in full view. The driver instantly realised the danger and desperately tried to swerve off the road, but he was too late.

Hugging the ground, I tugged the pull-switch and 21 kilograms of high explosives detonated a mere three metres from our ambush position. The darkness exploded in a gigantic flash and turned the Ural into a blazing inferno. Shrapnel whistled and screamed around us as the vehicle's momentum carried it forward until it was brought to a halt by a large tree. Its blazing hulk lit up the dark night.

The blast was deafening and the shock wave literally lifted us off the ground, but we had no time to assess the effects of what we had just done. We had to finish the job we had come to do while the enemy was still too stunned to react.

My ears were still ringing from the blast as I rose to my feet. I could vaguely hear the clattering of one of our machine guns as it poured fire into the convoy's second vehicle. I watched as green tracer rounds tore into the enemy troops who had stood up on the back to see what had happened.

Phil Cairns fired two M-79 rounds at the second truck in quick succession. His first missed and exploded harmlessly in the undergrowth, but the second exploded against its wind-shield. I hoped the explosion of the M-79 bombs would lead the enemy to believe that we had indirect fire support, and that we were part of a much larger attacking force.

Realising we were in a race against time, I led a killing team consisting of Phil Smith, Kevin, Cliffy, and Hiafeni in an extended line onto the road. We ran past the shattered bodies of dead and dying Angolan troops and focussed on what was happening to our front. Behind us pandemonium reigned as the small stay-behind group under Jim's command poured sustained fire into the stationary second vehicle.

Hiafeni and I simultaneously saw movement to our right. As one we cut down three or four dazed enemy soldiers. To my left, Phil and Kevin fired sporadically at opportunity targets as they presented themselves. The machine gunners were still pouring lead into the second enemy vehicle. I knew we wouldn't be able to hang around the area much longer

as we were depleting our ammunition rapidly. We quickly stripped what ammunition we could from some of the enemy dead; we realised we were going to need it.

In the eerie glow of the burning truck we saw a road sign that read 'Cahama: 2 km'. Unknowingly, we had sprung our ambush on the inner perimeter of FAPLA's 16 Brigade. We realised with a shock the extreme danger this posed. We were about twenty kilometres north of where we should have been and could expect the Angolans to launch a follow-up operation as soon as they had recovered from their initial surprise.

Cliffy, in his own moment of madness, charged through the huge pall of smoke that hung lazily across the road, only to be shot at by a tank. Luckily for us, it was a night-blind Soviet T-34 and in all probability the shot had been fired in fear and not directly at him.

"Shit, they got tanks!" Cliffy yelled as he fled back through the smoke, his eyes like big luminous saucers. Kevin and Phil laughed and told him to shut up. Until the day he left the battalion to return home to America, Cliffy insisted that the tank had aimed directly at him.

Having counted at least twenty bodies to our front—and perhaps many more lying in the darkness—I withdrew my killing team and linked up with Jim's stay- behind group. The ambush had taken only a few minutes, but it was time to leave. We silently slipped away into the dark bush.

Firing intensified behind us as chaos set in. Angolan soldiers began firing at Angolan soldiers in the confusion and darkness, and within minutes the whine of Soviet 122mm rockets cut into the noise and confusion we had left behind. The Angolans obviously had no idea where we had come from or where we had gone to so they were firing rockets, artillery shells, and mortars in every direction hoping to bracket us, slow us down, or kill us before we could escape. We wondered how many of them were being killed by their own fire as the noise reached a high crescendo.

Like us, the Angolans knew that daylight was only a few hours away—they would be able to find our tracks and hunt us down with the rising sun. We moved as quickly as we could, knowing that the enemy would mobilise rapidly and mount a follow- up operation once some form of control had been re-established. Our anti-tracking plans flew out the window as time was of the essence.

At about 02:00 we took a quick break to establish emergency radio contact with Battalion HQ. I also had to let the men rest—we had all started coming down from the adrenalin highs and fatigue was taking over. Phil Smith helped me set up the bulky HF radio with its sloping wire antennae and I tapped out my after-contact sitrep (situation report) in Morse code.

My message was short and to the point: we had made contact with an enemy convoy, inflicted casualties, suffered no casualties, and were close to an enemy brigade position due to a navigational error. We needed a hot extraction before sunrise.

"I copy that, EB," the voice of a battalion signaller crackled through my handset, "give the location for the extraction."

"Loc unknown," I tapped out on the Morse key. "Confirm 'unknown'?" the signaller responded.

I tapped out my reply: I was unable to give an exact location. The pilots would have to head for the road approximately two kilometres south of Cahama and look for the smoke plumes from the burning vehicles. From there they were to head directly east—we would try to talk them in to a landing zone when we found a suitable one.

"Roger, look out for them at first light," responded the signaller, "I will confirm your sitrep with Falcon. Good luck."

Mentally and physically exhausted and drenched with sweat, we tried to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and the enemy. We knew they would pick up our tracks at first light.

At about 03:00, the enemy rocket and artillery fire died down, indicating that the brigade was starting to recover its composure and getting ready to mount their follow-up. Spurred on by this thought, we covered ground as fast as we could. I did a quick ammunition check on the move and was horrified to discover that even with the resupply from the FAPLA dead, we were all running low on ammunition. We wouldn't be capable of putting up much of a fight if the enemy caught up.

By about 05:00 we heard the rumbling of a large number of enemy vehicles to our rear. It was evident they had found our spoor[41] and were determined to find us and extract their revenge.

As the sun slowly rose from the eastern horizon, we heard the friendly clatter of helicopter blades slicing through the early morning air. By then we were exhausted and close to collapse.

"Thank fuck they're finally here," Jim muttered to no one in particular. "Gunship, this is EB. Do you copy?" I called into my VHF handset. There was no response.

A few minutes later I repeated my call. A Puma pilot's voice came back to me.

"EB, this is Giant. I'm afraid no gunships are around. I'm on my own. Are you okay?"

I was stunned. Without gunship support, the Puma would present a perfect target when it flew in slow and low to extract us.

"Giant get the hell out of the area," I called. "There is a massive follow-up operation taking place. FAPLA are almost up our arses and there's likely to be a lot of triple A[42] around."

"Ah, okay, EB, shall I call for gunships?"

"Affirmative," I responded, trying to sound as calm as possible. "And if any fixed wings are available send them in for an air strike. We're going to need all the help we can muster to get out of this mess."

"Roger that EB. Will do," the pilot's calm voice responded.

Kevin, who had overheard my radio chat with the Puma, came running over. He was obviously furious. Jim just stared at me in astonishment.

"Boss, why the hell did you do that? We're about to have our arses kicked and you sent our lifeline away."

"Listen," I said.

The sound of several vehicles was getting closer rapidly. A burst of heavy machine-gun fire ripped through the bush.

"Jesus! They're using 23mm AA[43] guns for flushing fire," Kevin said.

I nodded, knowing that the Puma would have been shot out of the sky had I brought it onto our position.

With the enemy closing in we were motivated to move even faster (if that was possible—we were almost at the end of our tether) but it wasn't fast enough. We could hear vehicles crashing through trees and bush not far behind us. We were running for our lives—every second was a second closer to death. Nevertheless, I noted with pride that our discipline still held and there were no signs of panic on my men's faces.

After what seemed like hours my radio came to life again.

"EB, this is Gunship. Do you copy?" Arthur Walker asked calmly. "Cut the crap, Arthur," I snapped back, "we need help in a hurry."

"I can see that," he chuckled from across the ether. "Looks like you've got the whole bloody Angolan army on your tail. Don't worry, you silly Pongos.[44] Uncle Arthur and his boys will sort things out—before the fixed-wings[45] arrive."

Seconds later, the low growl of approaching enemy vehicles was drowned by the gunships as they swooped down like angry hornets with cannons blazing. All hell was let loose but it bought us the time we desperately needed to increase our distance from the enemy.

I yelled at Phil Cairns to loose off some M-79 rounds in the general direction of the enemy. Phil gave a weak smile and indicated that he had no more rounds left. I gave the order for our RPG-7 gunner to fire three rockets in quick succession in the general direction of the enemy follow-up. Even though he fired them high across the tree tops, I knew that with the time-delay activated, the rockets would air-burst and, hopefully, slow the enemy a bit more.

"Giant, do you copy?" I called to the Puma.

"Roger that EB—give me your loc and we'll have you out of there in a jiffy."

I shouted at Kevin and Phil Smith to find a suitable landing zone, and to Alfonso to throw a white phosphorous grenade to mark our position.

"Giant, we have marked our loc with white phosphorous," I said to the Puma pilot, "tell the Mirages and Impalas to stay clear of it. That's us!"

"That's okay, EB," a new voice crackled through the handset, "we've got your smoke visual."

To our despair the white phosphorous grenade thrown by Alfonso set the dry grass alight and we found ourselves contending with a bush fire—as if we didn't have enough problems. It was a perfect indication to the enemy of our position. Cliffy, Alfonso, and Hiafeni frantically tried to stamp the blaze out with their boots. Watching them dancing around as though they were practising some sort of lunatic jig prompted Phil Smith to burst out laughing. Despite the predicament we were in, the humour of the situation was not lost on us.

The noise of battle around and above was terrific with machine guns firing and gunship cannons blazing away. Above all this, I suddenly heard the strike aircraft pilots talking to the gunships.

"Okay gunships, make way. The big boys have arrived."

Then they swooped down, unleashing a storm of rockets and cannon fire. Kevin and Phil reappeared at the run.

"Quick, Boss, we've found a clearing," Kevin yelled.

"Get going—fast!" I shouted, emptying my last few rounds in the general direction of the enemy. We turned and crashed through the bush after Kevin and Phil. While running I called the Puma pilot once more.

"Giant, wait one. We've found an LZ and will mark it now."

Seconds later Kevin's white phosphorus grenade exploded and the Puma called me.

"EB confirm you have just chucked a white phos? I see white smoke to my front." "Affirmative, that's us," I shouted into the handset.

The Puma swooped down low and fast, its giant rotor blades slashing through branches in its path. We clambered aboard before it even had time to touch down properly.

I gave the flight engineer a thumbs-up. He smiled at me, spoke into his mouthpiece, and reciprocated my signal.

The pilot gave it full power and the Puma slowly lifted off the ground.

As it clawed its way out of the blazing LZ I smiled at my team. I remembered my mother having remarked, "What nice young boys they are," after meeting some of them. If only she could have seen them now.

Behind and below us lay total and utter destruction. Sitting in the door of the Puma alone with my thoughts and watching the smoke of battle disappear into the distance, I realised how lucky we had been.

When the Puma finally got back to the HAG we staggered from its belly, exhausted and grimy after our mission, but thankful to be alive. Some of the men collapsed under the trees on the banks of the Cunene River while I went off to brief Falcon and Ockert.

Falcon was ecstatic with the results.

"Well done, Eeben. This will set them back for a while," he mused. "It also shows what can be achieved using the element of surprise combined with aggressive action." The pilots later told me they could scarcely believe how close behind us the enemy had been. With typical pilot bravado, they said if it hadn't been for them, we'd all have been corpses rotting out in the bush. We knew they weren't wrong.

Radio intercepts later confirmed the results of our ambush.

The FAPLA sitrep said 'many' troops had been killed, '15 were missing' and all 'the equipment from the UK had been destroyed'[46]. So much for Britain having no involvement in the Angolan war, we thought. It was a bitter pill for those of us of British descent to swallow… those whose grandfathers, fathers, and uncles had fought for 'King and Empire' in two world wars. We also learnt that earlier that afternoon, a PLAN detachment[47] had linked up with FAPLA's forces at Cahama but had not taken part in the Angolan follow-up operation on us.

The enemy sitrep didn't elaborate on the after-action air strike except to say that their casualties had been 'huge' and their vehicle losses 'significant'. We knew that the

gunships and strike aircraft had caused far more havoc than we had—we had merely set the stage for them to exploit.

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We remained on deployment for a few more weeks, continuing to conduct reconnaissance missions, harassing the enemy, destroying roads and culverts, ambushing vehicles, and killing every enemy soldier we set our sights on.

Shortly after this action my promotion to captain was confirmed. On his return Willem and the men toasted my good health and promotion. In turn, we toasted his promotion to husband.

Despite being young soldiers, we were well versed in the art of killing. It was more than a job; it had become a way of life. Driven to push the envelope of danger and fuelled by adrenalin, we had no idea what the true impact of our actions was or who was profiting from them.

During the following months the size of the Reconnaissance Wing grew to more than 30 men, swelled by the induction of new blood from 44 Parachute Brigade's Pathfinder Company as well as men from a unit known as the SWA[48] Special Forces.

We gained men like Lieutenant Peter Waugh, Sergeants David van der Merwe and KD Clark, Corporal Jim McGuire, and many other fine soldiers. The Wing continued to do what it did best—reconnaissance, and locating, attacking, and killing the enemy.

Sometime during 1982, I was called back to South Africa to attend a 'secret' meeting my late brother James had set up. I was introduced to two representatives of the infamous Bureau of State Security (BOSS). BOSS was the government's civilian intelligence agency run by the notorious General Hendrik van den Bergh and many considered it to be a law unto itself. It did, however, have a reputation for being utterly ruthless in its activities and was only ever mentioned in very hushed tones. The two BOSS men knew a lot about me that even my brother didn't know. It was obvious that someone had given them a lot of background information.

I was sworn to secrecy over a cup of coffee in a quiet Pretoria restaurant near Church Square, and then asked if I had read the book Hit Team by David Tinnin and Dag Christensen. I had. The book dealt with an Israeli assassination team that had been sent to Europe to locate and assassinate members of the Black September terrorist group.

They wanted to know if I would consider joining BOSS and becoming part of a similar team (still being planned) aimed at locating and assassinating 'enemies of the State' beyond South Africa's borders. Although I was not interested in leaving 32 Battalion, I nevertheless agreed to undergo a day of tests to determine how suitable I would be for such an operation. At the end of the testing, I was again asked if I would consider joining BOSS and becoming a member of their planned hit team (I would later learn that this group was known as the 'Z-Squad'). At that time, I considered such operations to be unmilitary and I argued that I needed to face an enemy who was facing me with a gun; I wasn't willing to go to war against unarmed 'civilians' regardless of who they were or

what they represented. I either failed my tests dismally or BOSS didn't like my attitude. I had, however, taken note of the existence of such a group.

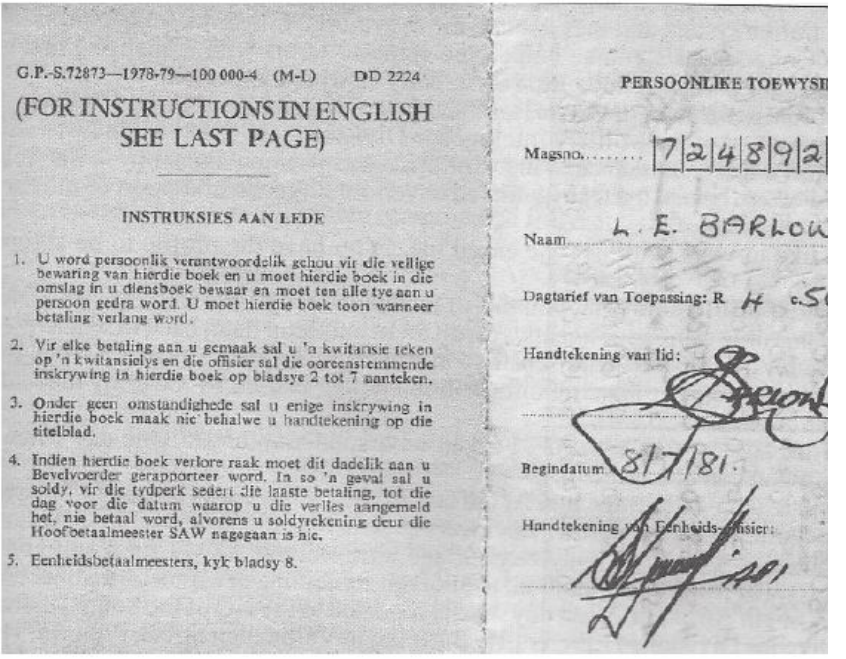
In late November/December of 1982, I was told that I would have to attend the SADF's seven-month required promotion course to the rank of major, known as the Combat Team Commanders Course. Colonel Ferreira suspected that the Engineers had put the wheels in motion to 'steal' me back from the Battalion having realised that I was indeed a sapper and not an infantryman.

When I was recalled to South Africa for the course in early January 1983, I knew my time serving in 32 Battalion had probably come to an end.

I knew that I would miss both the Wing and the Battalion, particularly the men I had served with. To suggest I was getting braver in the field with every day that passed would have been a lie. At the start of each operation, an inexplicable fear seemed to grip my guts; but being both team leader and second-in-command of the Wing, I had no alternative but to grin and bear it. I knew it was unlikely, however, that Lady Luck would continue to smile on me if I remained in the firing line.

On a cool morning in early January 1983, I felt the acid bite of tears as I wordlessly hugged each man who had loyally worked, served, and fought with me. I said goodbye, not knowing what the future would hold, either for them or myself. Before I clambered aboard the Buffel that was to take me back to the Battalion HQ in Rundu, I was presented with a hand-crafted wooden plaque inscribed: 'To one of the best—from the rest'.

The long drive back to Rundu gave me time to compose myself before wishing Colonel Ferreira farewell. It was with a heavy heart that I finally boarded the C-130 aircraft that would return me to South Africa and home.



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(FOR INSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH SEE LAST PAGE)

INSTRUKSIES AAN LEDE

1. U word persoonlik verantwoordelik gehou vir die veilige bewaring van hierdie boek en u moet hierdie boek in die omslag in u diensboek bewaar en moet ten alle tye aan u persoon gedra word. U moet hierdie boek toon wanneer betaling verlang word.
2. Vir elke betaling aan u gemaak sal u 'n kwitansie teken op 'n kwitansielys en die offisier sal die ooreenstemmende inskrywing in hierdie boek op bladsye 2 tot 7 aanteken.
3. Onder geen omstandighede sal u enige inskrywing in hierdie boek maak nie behalwe u handtekening op die titelblad.
4. Indien hierdie boek verlore raak moet dit dadelik aan u Bevelvoerder gerapporteer word. In so 'n geval sal u soldy, vir die tydperk sedert die laaste betaling, tot die dag voor die datum waarop u die verlies aangemeld het, nie betaal word, alvorens u soldyrekening deur die Hoofbetaalmeester SAW nagegaan is nie.
5. Eenheidsbetaalmeesters, kyk bladsy 8.

PERSOONLIKE TOEWYSI

Magsno. 7 2 4 8 9 2

Naam L. E. BARLOW

Dagtarief van Toepassing: R 4 c.5

Handtekening van lid:

Begindatum 8/7/81.

Handtekening van Eenheids-offisier:

Author's army paybook showing his operational 'danger allowance' of R4.50 per day.

03:

I Spy with My Little Eye

Back in South Africa, the ANC and PAC had continued their terrorist activities.

While I was attending the Combat Team Commander's Course, the ANC detonated a large car bomb in Church Street, Pretoria, opposite the Air Force headquarters and adjacent Poyntons building, where several Military Intelligence directorates shared offices.[49] Generally referred to as the 'Church Street bomb', this act of terror killed nineteen people and maimed and injured scores of military personnel and many innocent civilians—the official figure was listed as 200 casualties. This bombing also intensified the government's desire to eradicate the ANC—an approach I agreed with totally.

I was shocked that any organisation claiming to want a 'democratic' government would even consider callously murdering the very people it claimed to want to liberate and govern. In later years, Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa and leader of the ANC, would admit that he had 'signed off' the Church Street bomb from his prison cell on Robben Island.

South Africa was, however, not the only country that was feeling the effects of terrorism. On 18 April 1983, the US embassy in Beirut, Lebanon was struck by a massive car bomb that killed 63 and wounded more than 120 people. The bomb (approximately 1 000 kilograms of high explosives) was detonated by a suicide bomber, apparently motivated by American intervention in the Lebanese Civil War. Ironically, the international community condemned this bombing emphatically, but paid little or no attention to the Poyntons bombing.

I viewed the Poyntons bombing as a cowardly act of terrorism—comparable to violent and armed organised crime—except in this instance, the act of terror was supported by the West, the East, and, of course, several African countries. I viewed laying landmines in the farming areas to kill innocent farmers, their families, and their workers in a similar vein. Subsequently, these acts, along with a number of senseless restaurant bombings, led to several so-called pre-emptive strikes against known ANC personalities, safe houses, training camps, and the likes, beyond South Africa's borders. The Poyntons bombing had been planned and executed by the ANC from Botswana.

The car bomb detonated by the ANC against the Poyntons building elicited little to no condemnation from the international community (photo: Steve Hofmeyer)

As was expected, every aggressive offensive action launched by the SADF was followed by an international outcry, further sanctions against the country, and an intensification of the campaign to rid South Africa of its white government. The ANC could do no wrong in the eyes of the international community, and it was very obvious to anyone remotely observing the situation that the writing was on the crumbling wall as far as the National Party government was concerned. It would only be a matter of time before it collapsed and (with huge international support and assistance) got replaced by a pro-socialist ANC government with one foot in the communist camp and the other in African national-socialism.

The thought of the National Party government's demise and replacement by another political party didn't particularly bother me. My father had told me, years before, that a soldier's duty was to serve the government of the day, irrespective of whether or not he agreed with their policies. I once made a comment to that effect and almost destroyed my own career. I considered myself above politics, and refused to allow them to taint my beliefs. However, I did view terrorism as a cowardly crime, masquerading as 'a fight for liberation', especially when civilians were targeted. If any organisation was willing to stoop to that level of cowardice, I was quite content to do whatever I could to stop it. My one concern was that the international community, particularly the USA and the UK, appeared to want the new South African government to be a totalitarian regime that they could manipulate to their own ends.

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In 1982, while I was still serving with 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing, a Major Gerrie Bornman,[50] approached me to discuss a future option regarding my career. I had no idea who he was and simply assumed he was one of many civilians involved in lucrative

ivory, diamond, or precious wood smuggling businesses in the South West African operational area at the time.

By then, I had reached the conclusion that we were at war with Angola purely to gain control of its huge diamond and oil reserves (or if we couldn't control them, deny them to the Angolans).

There were whispered rumours that higher-ranking members of the South African Defence Force, several senior politicians, and even private civilian companies were involved in the financially rewarding illegal diamond trade, in harvesting and selling precious Angolan hard woods, and, most despicably, in exterminating vast elephant herds to cater for the internationally profitable, but highly illegitimate, ivory trade.

Additionally, a serious lack of moral fibre on the political front was preventing the SADF from ending the war—something we believed was possible, but a quick end to the war would be bad for commercial and political business interests.

The fact that young South African soldiers—brainwashed by psycho-babble about needing to fight for Christendom and fulfil their patriotic duty—were dying to support these activities was of no apparent concern to those making the money and supposedly providing political guidance.[51]

Noting my very obvious camouflage uniform and AK-47, Bornman introduced himself to me, and we spoke briefly about the war and the subject of intelligence. Bornman asked why I was in 32 Battalion, and what I thought about the SADF and the war in South West Africa and Angola. Not knowing whether he was a political appointee or a crooked businessman hoping to get something out of me, I chose my words very carefully. Then he told me he was required to dress in civilian clothes because he was a covert intelligence officer, and asked if I would be interested in working with him.

"Your profile suggests that you would make a good agent handler," he said. "I'm not sure exactly what it is you do," I responded with little interest.

"We identify possible espionage agents, recruit them, and get them to supply us with sensitive information," he said. "The army uses information we gather from agents in SWAPO, PLAN, and the Angolan army, to locate and attack their bases."

"Ah, so you're talking about spies!" I said with sudden interest. "One day when I get out of here you can count me in."

Major Bornman didn't forget me.

Before I had completed the Combat Team Commander's course, a signal from Directorate Engineers at Defence Headquarters arrived and advised me that I would not be returning to the Battalion—I was to be deployed elsewhere.

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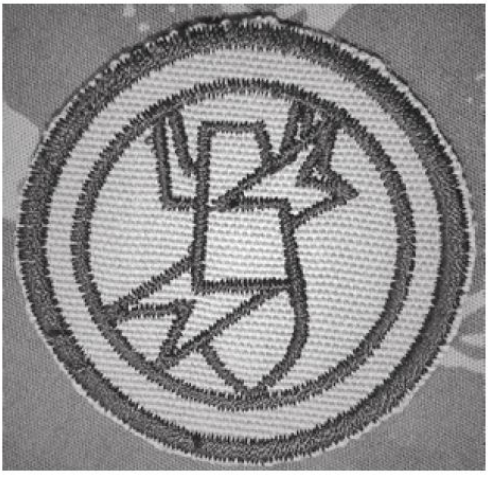
On successfully completing the course, I was briefly transferred to the Directorate of Engineers at Defence Headquarters to serve on the SADF's EOD/IED (Explosive Ordnance Disposal/Improvised Explosives Device) team while I waited to be transferred to the Directorate of Covert Collection (DCC).[52] Working in a team with Staff Sergeant

Brian Westwood of Special Forces HQ, I was often on stand-by to tackle and disarm any ANC/PAC bombs that were located.

Despite several hair-raising moments, there was a lot of humour in the EOD teams. At one point we were tasked to investigate the sighting of a limpet mine on a fuel bowser parked opposite Kruger House in Pretoria. Kruger House was something of a national monument, and tourist attraction, as it had been the residence of President Paul Kruger of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek.[53]

Jumping into our EOD vehicle, we raced through the streets of Pretoria to get to the target as quickly as possible. We both realised that, placed as it was on a fuel bowser, the bomb (if it exploded) would not only kill many civilians, but also be a major propaganda coup for the bomb layers, whoever they were. En route to the target area, Brian and I discussed our Render Safe Procedure (RSP). Time was of the essence so we decided not to put on our bulky EOD suits. These supposedly gave protection, but if we were anywhere near a limpet mine exploding on a fuel bowser we would be toast either way. We also agreed that if we found the mine, we would— despite the danger it posed to us—rip it off the bowser and throw it into an open patch of land near Kruger House, and then remotely explode it.



The SADF's EOD operator's qualification badge(photo: unknown)

By the time we arrived on the scene the SAP had already cordoned off the streets in the area, and Brian and I found the bowser and went through our RSP as quickly as we could. Our search, however, revealed no mine.

A few minutes later, we were able to log our call-out as a 'hoax' and return to the offices of Colonel Fussel, the EOD commander in Pretoria, for our standard debriefing.

Fussel had apparently been a member of the British Army's EOD teams in Northern Ireland and he took his position as the SADF's EOD commander very seriously—as indeed he ought to have.

Not the friendliest of people, Fussel glared at us as though we were somehow at fault for not having found a mine.

"If there was a limpet mine on the bowser, what steps would you have taken?" he asked Brian.

Quick as a flash, Brian responded, "Fucking big steps—in the opposite direction, sir".

Despite Fussel's snort of disgust, I burst out laughing. Fussel accused us of not taking our work seriously and threatened to remove us from the teams if ever we repeated our 'poor behaviour'. Brian and I were certainly never going to be flavour of the month after that episode.

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Shortly thereafter, news came through the grapevine that my transfer to the DCC was finally about to take place—but it would take some time before it was finalised. In a typical military administrative blunder, I had been transferred from the Directorate of Engineers to the Directorate of Foreign Technology, a military intelligence directorate that dealt mainly with paper studies on enemy weapon systems and tactics, techniques, and procedures.

I would be changing my uniform for a briefcase. My style of warfare was also about to undergo something of a transformation.

I donated the camouflage uniform and equipment I had carried during my shooting war to the Johannesburg War Museum, where it is still, to this day, on display under the heading, '32 Battalion Scout'.

I reported to the HQ of the South African Military Intelligence Division (SAMID) in the Liberty Life Building in Vermeulen Street, Pretoria, on a crisp autumn day. They didn't exactly welcome me with open arms…in fact, my reception matched the cool wind blowing outside in the city streets. Either the hierarchy had not been made aware of my pending arrival, or they weren't sure what to do with me. I later realised that the vast majority of shadow warriors employed there seldom knew what they were doing anyway.

I was shown to an empty office and told to start compiling briefs on enemy weapons, weapon systems, strategies, and tactics. It was also suggested that I was to beg, borrow, or steal a desk and chair from wherever I could. I chose the last option and soon had my office nicely furnished with a pilfered desk, carpet, chair, and filing cabinet. I even managed to find myself a telephone.

I sat around in the Directorate of Foreign Technology trying to look busy for nearly three months. What became quite clear was that most of my colleagues didn't want a combat-experienced captain poking around in their domain— especially not an English speaking one. The only person who befriended me was an ex-tank commander, Major Jos Britz, who had been transferred in from the Armour Corps.

So-called intelligence officers had been tasked to compile briefs on strategy and tactics they had never experienced, and weapons they had never seen (let alone used). I found it difficult to accept that the directorate was staffed with men and women who had never heard a shot fired in anger, yet were tasked to produce documents that were supposed to inform combat soldiers of what to be aware of. Jos and I were often amused by the incompetent bumbling that took place right before our eyes. From time to time—in a sudden flash of brilliance—one of our colleagues would produce something that could only have had the effect of making the enemy curl up and die laughing.

My brief time in Directorate Foreign Technology (DFT) was probably the most frustrating period of my entire military career. Equally frustrating was the fact that I was no longer able to work with the EOD teams and subsequently lost my EOD allowance as I had supposedly become something of a 'spook'. It was a small sum of money but it was very important to me at the time.

I wrote letter after letter requesting that my transfer to the DCC be finalised. I had never seen myself as a paper-pusher and I was desperate to get out of there. I very much wanted to be where I could make a difference in ending the ANC and PAC's campaign of terror against innocent, unarmed civilians.

Finally, after several months of haggling and complaining, approval for my transfer to the DCC was finally granted—but not before Colonel J Cloete, the Senior Staff Officer (SSO) Foreign Technology, made his bitchy and disingenuous remarks about my final request for transfer. He noted the following in his recommendation:[54]

From the above statement and from private talks with him it is clear that his only motivation is self-interest and not the SADF, as his skills and training in the Engineering and EOD [Explosive Ordinance Disposal/Improvised Explosives Devices] would have filled a much needed gap to the technical intelligence requirement of the Army and the SADF. It is recommended that he be transferred to DCC.

Cloete's comments were, in my opinion, typical of the pettiness that thrived amongst the paper-pushing senior officers, and they starkly contradicted the above- average merit assessments and commendations I had received at 32 Battalion:[55]

Member has been serving in this unit….an engineer officer he is employed as the second-in-command of the unit's reconnaissance wing. He was appointed in this post as he did exceptionally well in the selection course and operations thereafter. He delivers work of a very high standard. Member is totally loyal to the unit and towards the South African Defence Force.

Nevertheless, the die was cast and my transfer had finally been approved. At last, I thought, I would be doing what Major Gerrie Bornman had recruited me to do—identifying, recruiting, and running agents.

My excitement and expectations would soon be dashed. I would find myself in an organisation dedicated to gathering intelligence covertly in name only. In reality, the DCC

was largely built on nepotism, family ties, and political and religious loyalties, and though I did not lose any sleep over Cloete's remarks about being selfishly motivated, they silently followed me.

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I was greeted, upon my arrival at the DCC's head office at the Liberty Life building in Vermeulen Street, by Colonel Hennie Strauss. Strauss warmly welcomed me into the DCC and told me that his son was a serving 32 Bn member. I was given a week's leave in which to 'decontaminate' and prepare myself to 'go under cover'. I wasn't too sure how to do this but I gladly accepted the week I was given off.

I arrived at Afrinfo (Pty) Ltd's offices a week later. Afrinfo was a DCC cover company (ostensibly a market research company that did work for large 'international clients'). The offices, known as 'Section East Front', were located in Bureau Lane, near Church Square, Pretoria, and covered the so-called front-line states bordering South Africa (Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe).

I was met by Colonel At Nel, an Air Force officer who had been brought in from the Bureau for State Security (BOSS) to serve as the section's commanding officer.

At was a friendly man who never gave me a hard time. In fact, he was on friendly terms with all the agent handlers in his section and never asked any of them for much. I later realised that several of them reciprocated by not giving him much.

My attention was turned away from SWAPO/PLAN and FAPLA. My new enemy was to be the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), commonly known as MK. Included in the definition 'enemy' were also the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and their allies and supporters in the states bordering South Africa.

The ANC's objective was to overthrow the all-white National Party government and replace it with a black nationalist government. To this end, MK recruited many disillusioned young men from the sprawling and povertystricken black townships across South Africa and had them trained in Odessa in the Ukraine (then part of the Soviet Union). After training they were returned to camps in Angola, Tanzania, and Zambia, either to receive further training or to infiltrate South Africa for specific missions involving sabotage, subversion, and terrorism. Distance made it difficult for them to launch effective attacks. They had been forced to find safe routes into South Africa or operate underground; but by mid-1975 the politics in Africa were turning in their favour.

The Portuguese, in hastily abandoning their colonies, had left the door open to newly established black governments in Angola and Mozambique. This had opened several new infiltration routes into South Africa and several of these so-called liberation movements were supported by both the West and the Soviet Union.

A year after Portugal had abandoned Angola to its fate, the ANC were allowed to establish a training school for military engineers in Luanda. The facilities expanded steadily until, by 1978, the ANC had guerrilla camps at Fundo, Nova Katenga (used as a training depot), Quibaxe, Pango, and the Quatro detention camp. They occasionally paid

their rent by assisting FAPLA in its fight against UNITA—ironically the same UNITA that had once given succour to SWAPO/PLAN. They also established camps in Tanzania. Their cadres were given ongoing training by their hosts' militaries and also by Cubans, East Germans, and the Soviets in both Angola and Mozambique.

By then the ANC had established its headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, which was the closest they could get to the South African border—their way still being barred by Zimbabwe,[56] Botswana, and to some extent, Swaziland.

In 1978, a deputation of ANC and MK leaders flew to Vietnam and met with the legendary guerrilla leader of the Viet Cong, General Giap, to gain ideas on how to escalate their lowintensity operations into a full-scale 'People's War'. This deputation included men like ANC President Oliver Tambo, MK Chief of Staff Joe Slovo, MK Commander Joe Modise, and the Deputy Secretary of the Revolutionary Council, Cassius Make.

Giap advised the ANC to develop a long-term plan with precisely defined military and political objectives. He also stressed the importance of military strategy, training, and logistics. Giap's suggestions and lessons were documented in a report to the ANC/MK hierarchy and became known as 'The Green Book'.

Using the Green Book as a guide, Joe Slovo began to work on a new strategy (the 'three-year plan for Armed Propaganda') for the ANC and MK, in which military and terror tactics became part of a wider political strategy.

It was set out as follows:

- 1979: 'The Year of the Spear'—Named after the 1879 Zulu victory over British Forces at Isandlwana, this year would be marked by an escalation in military actions conducted by the ANC.
- 1980: 'The Year of the Charter'—In which the aim would be to broaden an understanding of the ANC's manifesto (The Freedom Charter) which, although 25 years old, was not well-known within South Africa.
- 1981: 'The Year of the Youth'—In which the ANC would focus on gaining recruits under the slogan 'Swell the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe'.

In effect, the objective of the three-year programme was to gain maximum media publicity for MK's actions at home and abroad in order to drive home the fact that the ANC and MK were alive and well, hence, MK's targets would be those likely to attract massive media attention[57] and entice the youth into their ranks.

It was believed that the final phase of this plan—launching 'The Year of the Youth', would ultimately lead to a 'People's War', which in turn, would result in a civil war and bring an end to white rule in South Africa.

By 1980 the ANC had established several safe houses in Motola (a suburb of Maputo in Mozambique) and were infiltrating guerrillas into South Africa through Swaziland. In January 1981 this route was disrupted by 6 Reconnaissance Commando's[58] daring raid on Motola during which the ANC's safe houses were devastated—along with their plans.

Earlier, in 1974, MK's Chris Hani had covertly moved to Maseru in Lesotho and he remained there for eight years under the auspices of Lesotho's Prime Minister, Chief Jonathan. Hani's task was to infiltrate MK cadres into South Africa with a view to building up the ANC's alliances with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) using Maseru as a transit area.

To change Chief Jonathan's mind about helping the ANC, the South African Security Forces assisted the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA) under the code name Operation Latsa, which caused Jonathan no end of problems. Finally Chris Hani's efforts and the ANC's structures in Maseru were completely disrupted by the South African Reconnaissance Commando's pinpoint raid on their facilities in December 1982 under the code name Operation Lebanta. Hani then fled to Lusaka.

By 1985 the ANC was well established in Gaberone (Botswana) and the majority of its sabotage and terrorist actions were being planned and launched from Gaberone and surrounds. This was a thorn in the side of, not only the South African government, but also the white South African farmers who suffered most from their actions. The ANC also established several safe houses in Botswana which became a useful transit route for MK members travelling to South Africa from Zambia and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe had by then (under pressure from Britain) installed a black government under the leadership of President Robert Mugabe.[59] Despite Mugabe having lost the election, England wanted him in control in Zimbabwe. He was also not favourably disposed towards the ruling white National Party in South Africa.

It was against this backdrop of political change and upheaval that the ANC was identified as South Africa's prime enemy and the main focus of my intelligence collection efforts.

At DCC, the author's primary collection target became the African National Congress (photo: SA History Online)

Afrinfo's sole purpose was to provide loose cover for the many agent handlers operating from its premises. Needless to say, everyone working within two blocks of Afrinfo's offices knew that it was a den of wannabe spies.

After our preliminary meeting, Colonel Nel led me along a dingy corridor and introduced me to Commandant 'Phillip Du Preez' and Major 'Dries Van Wyk', who staffed the subsection to which I had been allocated ('Subsection C', with Botswana as the target area we were responsible for).

The DCC had recruited both of them under a special project known as Hotpoint. Despite their obvious lack of military experience, they had been given military ranks and aliases for security reasons. To my surprise, they were also paid far more handsomely than mere professional soldiers like myself.

Du Preez, the subsection head, was a sloppy and overweight man who carried himself as though he was a swashbuckling man of mystery. I immediately realised that he was a political appointee who had gained his job through family connections, the church, or political affiliations. Van Wyk, on the other hand, was a snappy dresser with a booming laugh that always indicated his presence in the building.

I was subordinate in rank to both. Neither displayed any pleasure in the fact that I would be joining them and they promptly started referring to me as daai Rooinek (that redneck).[60] I reciprocated by dubbing them 'Laurel and Hardy'.

It was immediately obvious that I was very unwelcome; I seemed to have entered a private empire where the likes of someone like me were frowned upon. Here, I would have to discover for myself what was expected of me as my immediate superior and his loyal assistant avoided me wherever possible. I would later discover that they were also very loyal to the National Party—and to themselves. It was then that my view of the role of politics in the Armed Forces started to change.

Looking at the men I was to share my new future with made me think of the old saying, 'Every arsehole knows a lot about war, especially those who have never been there'. The majority of them wouldn't have lasted a second in a firefight, yet they were gathering intelligence from which operations were to be planned and launched. Although I found that truly astonishing, I also realised that many of them had been placed in the DCC to protect them from being deployed to combat units so that they would be shielded from the real war. At that time, politics greatly influenced who would be sent off to die for the National Party's strategy. Instead of entering a world of 'cloak and dagger', I found myself in a world of 'joke and swagger'.

When I asked Du Preez what my specific role in Botswana was to be, he answered, "Just watch and learn from us. We don't need anyone compromising our plans or our agents."

The clear implication was that I wouldn't be allowed to read any of the 'intelligence' they had gathered on Botswana, nor would they willingly teach me what I was supposed to be doing. I would just have to work that out for myself.

I was used to working in units where mission-success and survival were based on mutual trust and teamwork, and I was surprised to find that this was not the case in the unit I had just entered. I was, additionally, used to my commanders knowing their missions and being able to lead their men, motivate those under their leadership, give advice, and mentor subordinates that were unsure. This was certainly not the case within the DCC, East Front's Section C.

I would also soon discover that those few agent handlers who were not part of the DCC-clique were usually looked down upon, despite being competent and hard- working. Some were ex-combat soldiers like myself and others were professional intelligence officers who had gone through the mill and understood what was expected of them. From them I would learn about recruiting and running agents, clandestine communications, dead-letter drops, and streetcraft. But they were a minority and their whispered comments about the sad situation within the DCC reflected their own frustrations. For me, a fucking Rooinek, the situation was even grimmer.

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To compound my already precarious entrance into the DCC's EF (SC), I was summoned to the nearby Liberty Life Building where Colonel Bloemhof, the acting head of the DCC, told me I should pack my bags. I was about to be sent to Turkey to assist a local defence contractor and manufacturer of mine detectors and military radio communications equipment known as Reunert Technology Systems (more commonly referred to as Reutech) with their marketing drive in that country. This was the result of me having briefly assisted them with background information about then current mine warfare trends in the South West African operational theatre while I was at the Directorate of Engineers. As an ex-sapper, it was felt that I would be able to make a positive contribution to Reutech's marketing drive, especially in the field of counter-mine warfare. I was to go under cover as a marketing executive with the important-sounding title, 'Product Engineer', and my role was to assist their marketing team in unlocking the Turkish defence market.

Despite their surprise at hearing that I was about to leave for an overseas trip, Laurel and Hardy were quite pleased to see the back of me. I was equally pleased to be rid of them, even if it was only to be for a few weeks.

On the morning of my intended departure, I was advised that a different agent handler (someone who needed 'foreign exposure') would be accompanying the Reutech team despite having no experience in mine warfare or ever having used a military radio. It was only after Reutech intervened[61] that the DCC finally relented and allowed me to accompany them. I suspected that nepotism had reared its ugly head, and that the agent handler earmarked to take my place was somehow politically connected or related to some senior officer in MI.

Under the leadership of Will Crook, Reutech's marketing team left South Africa for Ankara, Turkey. Will was a jovial, larger than life character but when things had to be done, he was at the forefront of the work. Accompanying us was Ted Jones, a real Reutech

engineer who was quiet but extremely knowledgeable regarding all Reutech defence products.

Our flight, via Frankfurt, Germany, was exciting yet uneventful, but when we landed in Ankara, we discovered that our sensitive radio equipment and mine detectors had gone missing. We were only able to recover them 24 hours later after much blustering, swearing, and cursing.

At the conclusion of one of our many meetings in Ankara, I was asked to meet a general from a Turkish armoured division in private. General Sitka Sunday had

On the Bospheros, Turkey, with Reutech staff. Author's first mission under cover

clearly not been taken in by my cover story,[62] and asked if I would consider coming to Turkey to train his men in mine warfare, small-unit tactics, and demolitions for a few months. Before I could stammer my way through an appropriate answer, his phone rang and after a few brief words in Turkish he excused himself from the office.

Left alone at his desk, I couldn't help noticing a pile of US Army Combat Engineer manuals bearing a confidential security classification. I scanned his office for hidden cameras and finding it clear, grabbed one of the manuals and concealed it in the lining of my suit jacket. UN sanctions had made information about new approaches and weapons technologies completely unavailable in South Africa, so anything I could lay my hands on would prove useful to our army. I hadn't seen this manual before and thought it might provide insight into the US army's operational techniques.

By the time the general returned to his office I had composed myself sufficiently to tell him that his offer had come as a surprise, that I had only resigned my commission in the South African army a few months earlier, and that I would need time to think about it. He nodded and suggested I get back to him in the near future. He also said he believed I could be of great value to the Turkish army. The only things I could really think about were how not to be caught with the stolen manual, and how to get it back to South Africa. I had visions of myself in a situation reminiscent of Midnight Express,[63] and they weren't pleasant.

As soon as I got the opportunity, I mailed the manual to a friend in the UK who in turn forwarded it to an address in South Africa where I would be able to collect it.

After numerous meetings in Ankara, we took a flight to Istanbul. I got the chance to visit the Turkish Armed Forces' headquarters and several military research-and-development and manufacturing facilities across Turkey. At the various meetings scheduled by Reutech, I discussed the role of combat engineers in operations and the importance of specifying battle-proven equipment. I concentrated mainly on mine warfare, demolitions, and communications systems. This prompted my Turkish hosts to ask me to give a lecture on the SAEC's experiences in counter-mine operations at a combat-engineer facility near Izmir. As this fell somewhat outside my cover as a product engineer for Reutech, the Turkish Army planned and executed my visit in great secrecy.

When I returned to South Africa several weeks later, it was evident that my two fellow spies weren't too happy to see me again and had no intention of giving me any of their time. I decided to do things my own way and arranged a meeting with one of the Botswana intelligence analysts to discuss the collection target area with her. Lieutenant (Navy) Marietta van Dyk was both friendly and helpful. She guided me through the intelligence available, indicated which pieces were missing from the puzzle, and suggested intelligence targets for future operations.

"What would you consider your first priority?" I asked.

"I know that Special Forces are gearing up for an operation in Botswana sometime in the near future so I think a breakdown of the Botswana Defence Force's (BDF) order of battle would be useful. We know the BDF is turning a blind eye to ANC and PAC activities there. We also suspect they are extending them some form of support.

We need to identify the units stationed in and around Gaberone and assess whether they'll intervene if we strike ANC or PAC targets there. At this moment we have absolutely no idea what the BDF looks like or how it is organised," she said.

I was taken aback. Considering how long Subsection 'C' had been operating, it was incredible that Du Preez and Van Wyk had not yet managed to recruit an agent or two within the BDF. They had left the analysts in MI completely in the dark.

"I don't know much about what they do in Subsection 'C'," said Marietta when I voiced my surprise, "but they certainly haven't provided me with much intelligence. Perhaps it's so secret they think even I shouldn't know," she joked.

I promised Marietta that the BDF would loom large in my collection sights, and that I would do what I could to build the profile she needed—not that I had any idea how I

would go about it.

My two colleagues were not impressed when they heard my visit to Turkey had been considered highly successful, or that Reutech had written to Military Intelligence, thanking them for my contribution and describing my assistance in their marketing drive as 'significant'.[64]

"Subsection 'C' may not appear to you as glamorous as Angola or Turkey," said Du Preez giving me his best hard-man stare, "but we deal with real agents here and it is often extremely risky work. What do you actually know about our target country, Botswana, other than the fact that it is a neighbouring state?"

"A little. To be precise I went to school in Francistown,"[65] I said. "I've also spent a considerable amount of time in combat so I suppose I have some knowledge of how to handle risk. Have you ever been to Botswana?"

"Don't get smart-arsed with me," Du Preez growled, giving me a Clint Eastwood glare.

I realised I had somehow ended up in the wrong war film. Du Preez knew absolutely nothing about the shooting war, yet he was trying to intimidate me by trying to suggest our job was risky. Did he really think my service with 32 Battalion had been one long holiday?

I identified the moment as a good one in which to hand over the classified US army manual. His reaction didn't disappoint me.

"I stole this from a general's office in Ankara," I said. "What must I do with it?"

Du Preez grabbed it with both hands, eyes agog, and then got off his chair and waddled down the passage to Colonel Nel's office. What happened to the manual after that I never heard, but I'm sure it was securely locked away where no one would ever see or use it; that's what happened to most classified documents—Military Intelligence didn't seem to know what to do with them. I later spoke to friends in the Directorate of Engineers and they confirmed that the manual had never been passed to them.

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A few days later an old friend phoned me at home. 'Harry Visser' had been a platoon, and later a company commander in 32 Battalion, and we had gotten to know each other fairly well during operations. He was working in Botswana and travelling back to South Africa for a few days, and he suggested we meet for dinner.

I couldn't believe my luck. During the course of our phone conversation (which was conducted in reasonably guarded language) I told him that I was working for a marketing company and needed a copy of the latest Botswana telephone directory—I wanted to build a possible client list for a marketing drive.

A week later, we met at the Sanlam Centre in Pretoria. Harry was a jovial fellow with a quick and easy smile and a happy-go-lucky attitude that belied his ability to be ruthless when necessary.

"Echo Bravo!" he greeted me with a grin and a firm handshake, "I don't believe a word of what you said on the phone. What the hell are you up to?"

"Well, Harry, you know the old saying—if I tell you I'll have to kill you," I joked.

As we talked over dinner, I recruited Harry as my first agent and gave him his very first intelligence task. He was to focus his collection efforts on the BDF, mainly in and around the capital, Gaberone. I gave him instructions about how to establish contact, and details of his reporting, administrative, and emergency channels, and told him how he should convey information he deemed urgent. I had not yet undergone any training on how to recruit and run agents, but I realised we would both have to apply some common sense. I also asked him to do some talent spotting[66] as I needed to identify and recruit agents within the BDF.

Before parting, Harry gave me a copy of the Botswana telephone directory.

Studying it that night, I could hardly contain my excitement. It contained a mine of information (where BDF units were stationed, who the commanders were…right down to names, addresses, and telephone numbers) from which I was able to draw up an outline of the BDF's order of battle. The PAC office's phone number and one of its senior officials in Gaberone were also listed. This later proved to be an important item of intelligence.

The next morning I attached the outline of the BDF's order of battle to an intelligence report form, took it to Colonel Nel's office, and casually put it on his desk saying, "I got this from an agent last night".

"Jesus!" he muttered as he scanned it. "How on earth did you get this? Have the analysts seen it?"

"No, sir," I responded, "I've just finished drawing it up. You're the first to see it." "Phone Marietta immediately and tell her to meet us for coffee in an hour's time.

This is vitally important information…she must get it as soon as possible."

I was a little flabbergasted and also excited. I had only been with the section for ten days (since my return from Turkey) and I had already achieved something that Laurel and Hardy hadn't managed to in several years. I knew it would go down like the proverbial lead balloon with both of them.

Before we met Marietta, Colonel Nel showed Du Preez what I had compiled from information given to me by my 'agent'. Du Preez tried hard to show some delight but I could see he was actually seething with anger and embarrassment.

"As the subsection head I think I should attend the meeting with Marietta," he said.

I immediately realised he was trying to insert himself into the narrative in an attempt to imply that he had actually played an important role in getting the information. I had no intention of allowing that.

"I believe I should attend the meeting Sir," I interrupted. "This information came from a vulnerable source and it should be restricted on a "need-to-know" basis."

I decided then and there never to reveal that my vulnerable source had in fact been the Botswana telephone directory.

Nel nodded his agreement and we left Du Preez furious but firmly lodged behind his desk.

Marietta was ecstatic. She considered the report something of an intelligence coup. It was just what she needed for her planning and input for the intended operations into

Botswana.

"Shall I task my agent to confirm aspects like weapons, reaction times, emergency plans, and so on?" I asked.

The colonel turned to me.

"You're a soldier. You know what to look for. Get it and pass it on to Marietta. Congratulate your agent on this brilliant piece of work and well done to you too."

It struck me that with Nel and Marietta, it was a case of the blind leading the blind. Neither of them seemed to have a clue about what kind of intelligence soldiers needed before conducting operations.[67]

Aside from all that, I had no idea how to congratulate the telephone directory for its valuable input.

I contacted Harry and tasked him to determine what the BDF's likely reaction would be if a Special Forces raid was mounted in and around the environs of Gaberone. I knew that by watching them carefully, he would be able to assess their combat readiness, discipline, morale, and so on.

He took to intelligence gathering like a duck to water. I was soon able to provide the information that Marietta required to build a complete picture, and over a period of several weeks we were able to gain comprehensive insights into the BDF's activities and training areas. Harry also identified a middle-ranking officer in the BDF's Air Wing and developed a firm friendship with him.

This officer happened to mention to Harry one day that he was about to visit friends in Johannesburg. I met him at the hotel where he was staying 'by chance' and we also became friends. After this I told Harry to distance himself from the target as I didn't want him compromised when I made my pitch to recruit him.

'Michael' succumbed to the recruitment and readily agreed to work for me, immediately providing me with a considerable amount of information on the BDF's Air Wing. This enabled me to build up an even more detailed order of battle that included the BDF's air capabilities.

There were occasional lighter moments. One time, Harry called on his emergency channel and arranged to meet me at Zeerust (a small town close to the Botswana border) the next morning.

"I've seen an AGS-17 grenade launcher on a BDF vehicle," he told me.

The AGS-17 is a Soviet-designed 30mm automatic grenade launcher developed to engage enemy troop and weapon concentrations. Firing impact-fuse fragmentation rounds fed from a 29-round metal link box, this weapon system is capable of delivering fire over a distance of approximately 1 700 metres at a rate of 420 rounds per minute. Deployed against lightly-armed Special Forces operators in the open, the weapon would have a devastating effect. If deployed off vehicles in a mobile fire support or suppressing fire role, its mobility coupled to rate of fire makes it a formidable weapon.

1 .

I submitted an intelligence report on its sighting.

Du Preez called me into his office and quizzed me about it.

"Is the AGS-17 a four-wheel drive vehicle or is it one of those more recent ones with eight wheels?"

I just laughed and curtly suggested he read Jane's Infantry Weapons (an authoritative work on the subject) to find the answer. His question merely confirmed my low opinion of him.

I continued to develop my little network of agents. By late 1984 I had recruited a wellknown left-wing South African journalist, a middle-ranking officer serving in the BDF, a low-level ANC operative, a surveillance agent in Gaberone, and a PAC courier. And, of course, I also had Harry.

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In early 1985 Marietta asked me for an urgent meeting.

"Special Forces have started planning an operation into Botswana and it has been approved by the State Security Council," she told me. "Obviously this is good news for us, but we have a problem: the majority of available intelligence has come from the SAP's Security Branch (SB) and Special Forces itself. Our contribution is virtually nil." The State Security Council (SSC) had been created by Prime Minister John Vorster in 1972 but it was President PW Botha who (in late 1979/early 1980) had turned it into a formidable body. It was chaired by PW Botha and consisted of a secretariat and a host of components known as Joint Management Centres, Working Groups, Interdepartmental Committees, Mini-Joint Management Centres, and Joint Liaison Forums. Its raison d'etre was to advise the government on policy and strategy relating to the security of the Republic. By 1985, the SSC had become a government within a government, with the SADF chairing the majority of the Joint Management Committees.

Marietta outlined what she needed. Laurel and Hardy had failed to supply any sound intelligence on the whereabouts of ANC or PAC members in and around Gaborone. The information from their so-called agents was sketchy and generic— nothing that could lead to the identification of a definite military target. This was despite the Chief of Staff Intelligence (CSI) having ordered the DCC to play a more prominent role in the preparation of the intelligence dossier for the upcoming operation. The pettiness of inter-unit and inter-service rivalry had reared its ugly head, and CSI certainly didn't want the SAP's SB and Special Forces to take all the credit if the operation proved successful. On the other hand, if things went badly we would presumably slink back into the shadows.

Laurel and Hardy had by then virtually shunned me and blocked my access to ANC and PAC intelligence requirements passed to our subsection by the analysts. This made for a very unpleasant working environment.

"I'll see what I can do," I promised. "But I'll need copies of the taskings you have generated on the ANC and PAC as well as any other input that Special Forces might need. I'm sure Laurel and Hardy won't give them to me even if I ask."

I contacted Harry and set up an emergency meeting in Zeerust. I was concerned that he could be under surveillance and that someone might follow him across the border from

Botswana. At that time, my late brother was a member of the SAP's Vehicle Theft Branch and I decided to ask for his assistance.

"Of course I'll help you," said James, "if I see someone following him I'll just arrest them on suspicion of driving a stolen vehicle. That will take them out of your hair for a while."

My meeting with Harry was brief as his cover story had a time restriction that demanded he return to Botswana as soon as possible. My brother, meanwhile, hovered around in the background acting as my counter-surveillance agent.

I tasked Harry to find anything he could relating to the ANC and the PAC. "You mean like a target?" he asked.

"Yes, anything or anyone that constitutes a target. We can always try to confirm it using other sources. It can be a person, a vehicle, a facility, or even a safe house. But please remember—if you report a target that turns out to be false and it's whacked by Special Forces, you can guess what will happen to me."

After that I got my intelligence taskings on the ANC and PAC directly from Marietta, bypassing Laurel and Hardy. I reciprocated by taking them out of the loop for whatever I was working on. This strange behaviour, necessitated by circumstance, struck me as bizarre. I was used to working in units where everything centred on team cooperation; not member isolation. It was equally odd that Du Preez was responsible for completing my annual 'performance assessment rating' despite having shown no interest in what I was doing. Needless to say, he assessed me at well below average but I didn't lose any sleep over that.

Harry contacted me two weeks later and we arranged to meet in Pretoria. His cover was that he was travelling to South Africa to buy medicines for a friend so he was able to remain for a day or two without attracting suspicion.

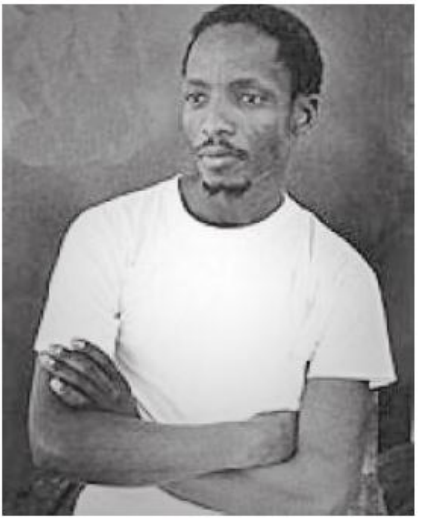
"I think I've found something of interest," he said with a grin. "It's a genuine ANC target. I have photographs of him and his house. His name is Thami Mnyele."

"Holy shit! How did you get this stuff'?" I asked, examining the photographs and scribbling down the information he had given me.

"Easy, but to quote you: 'If I tell you, I will have to kill you!' I'm actually beginning to build up a nice network of so-called refugees from South Africa. The ANC might even ask me to join them one of these days."

I could scarcely hide my excitement. I arranged to meet him later that evening and raced off to see Marietta. She shared my enthusiasm. Mnyele was well known and she confirmed his identity by cross-checking Harry's photographs with those on her database. New intelligence requirements on Mnyele were immediately generated and I passed these on to Harry during our meeting that evening.

Amid a flurry of further taskings from Marietta, I spent the next few days focussing purely on the ANC, and particularly on Thami Mnyele.



ANC operative Thami Mnyele was killed in a Special Forces raid in Gaborone (photo: SA History Online)

I also had a meeting with Major Gray Branfield, an operative working for Project Barnacle, a highly secretive group within Special Forces. Created by Major General Fritz Loots in mid-1980, Project Barnacle was actually a mutation of a small intelligence unit called The Section of Pseudo Operations (this clumsy name was soon changed to D40). Project Barnacle had initially been staffed by black and white ex-Rhodesians, and was to play many an important role in South African Special Forces' operations, especially in gathering intelligence.

The 'Top Secret' directive issued by Loots on 9 January 1981 formalised Project Barnacle's operational raison d'etre as follows:

1 Purpose: To manage extremely sensitive operations.

Functions:

1.1 Eliminations.

1.2 Ambuscades against individuals of strategic importance.

1.3 Operativeness as instructed in super sensitive operations.

1.4 Gathering combat information regarding the above-mentioned operations.

1.5 Gathering information as assigned in cases where other sources could not be utilised.

1.6 Conducting special security tasks, such as observation of sources/agents and the performance of certain special tasks, such as observation of random security experiments for Special Forces as instructed.

I was introduced to Major Branfield by Lieutenant Anton Pretorius of the SAP's Security Branch at Protea, Soweto. Anton, in turn, had been introduced to me by my brother who had described him as a 'good guy'. Anton knew that Gray and I were both working on targets in Botswana and felt we should meet to determine what synergy there was between us. Before Anton could effect this introduction, he first had to get permission from his commanding officer, Captain Tiekie de Jager. He had known such meetings were considered 'illegal' by our petty seniors, but we considered prohibition of exchanges of information ridiculous; we were all supposed to be working towards the same end result. The consequence of this top- echelon-imposed inter-unit rivalry between intelligence services was that one hand truly never knew what the other was doing, to the point where one hand sometimes wounded the other. It also created an unpleasantly antagonistic atmosphere.

Gray and I never became friends but we both thought the proposed raid appeared to be more of a political attempt to pacify South African public opinion than a military operation to deal a decisive blow to the ANC. Despite our reservations we both continued gathering intelligence as we had been ordered to.

On the morning of 14 June 1985, I awoke to news on the radio that South African Special Forces had attacked targets inside Botswana. Also mentioned was the killing of Thami Mnyele, a junior MK leader who was purportedly involved in the training of socalled 'suicide squads' for the ANC. He had not been the only ANC member to die that night. The August 1985 edition of the ANC's magazine Sechaba confirmed seven other victims.

Harry's intelligence had been correct—there had been little or no immediate reaction from the BDF.

Laurel and Hardy were very full of themselves at that morning's intelligence conference, intimating with a nudge-nudge, wink-wink attitude that they had played a significant role in the operation. I said nothing.

Shortly after the raid, Botswana's President, Quett Masire, issued a statement saying that twelve people had been killed. This was later revised to 14. He didn't name the casualties but Radio Botswana reported that most of the fatalities had been 'South African refugees'.

In spite of the ANC having mounted several terrorist attacks into South Africa from Botswana, the international community quickly condemned the pre-emptive strike as outrageous and barbaric. Such knee-jerk statements made me realise that the international community would quickly condone any ANC action while immediately condemning any retaliation by South Africa.[68] The writing was slowly beginning to appear on the wall; it would only be a matter of time before South Africa would be forced to negotiate a settlement with the ANC and its allies, ending the apartheid era forever.

I later learnt that the Botswana raid had been codenamed Operation Plexi and that the bulk of the intelligence had come from the SAP's SB and Project Barnacle (some of the Barnacle operatives had acted as guides for the Special Forces' assault teams). At best, the DCC's Subsection 'C' had managed to provide details for only one target.

I met Gray several days later and found him furious that the raid had even gone ahead. In his view, the target selection had been quantitative rather than qualitative, rendering the operation less successful than it should have been. He was also upset that, on the night of the raid, senior police and military officers at the Tactical HQ had been drinking and partying with scant regard for the operators engaged in life or death operations just across the border. He said he had expressed his disgust to senior Special Forces officers, but (in his own words) they would 'probably do fuck-all'.

Working as a private security contractor in 2004, Gray Branfield became one of the many South African fatalities in Iraq.

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I was promoted to major shortly afterwards, not because of any brilliance on my part but simply because it was due.

In the following months I cultivated and recruited an agent codenamed 'The Mechanic', who owned a garage in Gaberone and was able to provide detailed information on the vehicles being used by the ANC and PAC. I was clearing The Mechanic's dead letter drop one day when I found an interesting message. It simply read: 'Barry Gilder found'.

Gilder was a well-known member of the SACP.

"It would be good to know what he is up to," said Marietta at our next meeting.

I followed up by meeting The Mechanic at the luxury Sun City hotel resort in the Pilansberg a few days later. An old sapper friend of mine held a senior position in the hotel's security group and I had recruited him as a support agent and safehouse keeper several months earlier. He had agreed to arrange a room for me whenever I needed a quiet place to debrief agents.

The Mechanic had heard a lot of activity in an upstairs room while visiting a friend who also owned a garage in Gaberone. His friend had explained that he was renting the room to Barry Gilder—a 'South African communist activist'. The Mechanic visited his friend more often, and over time identified several ANC and SACP members who were frequenting Gilder's upstairs room.

I asked him to describe Gilder and he did so very accurately. "Will you recognise him if I show you a photograph?' I sked.

I needed proper confirmation before submitting a report to Marietta. I showed him photographs of various white ANC and SACP members all believed to be active in and around Gaberone. He promptly identified Gilder.

Over the next few weeks we built up a dossier on Barry Gilder and his contacts—where and when they met, and so forth. The Mechanic even offered to eliminate Gilder for R20 000[69] using his own rifle, and claimed that it would be a fairly easy hit.

On instructions from the DCC, I turned down his offer but we were able to glean a lot of information by watching Gilder.[70] As usual, no one knew what to do with it, so nothing was done to neutralise him or any of his contacts. I started to notice that Marietta was also becoming frustrated with the situation.

By mid-1987 I had built up a formidable agent network that gave me wide intelligence coverage on Botswana and further afield. I controlled people within the SACP, the ANC, the PAC, and the BDF, and I had also begun to develop a network of contacts in England, Portugal, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, even though they fell well outside of my area of responsibility. I thought I might need to call on them one day. I had come to realise that to be successful in the art of intelligence collection, one needed as many friends and contacts as possible.

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During 1988, several apparently unrelated events occurred that had the potential to place South Africa in an even more precarious international position than what it already was. At that time some members of Britain's elite Special Air Service (SAS) were in Botswana, training the BDF's Special Support Group (commanded by Major Kgokgotswane).

Pan Am Flight 103 was blown out of the sky over Lockerbie, Scotland on 21 December 1988.[71] In retaliation, the US Air Force launched F-111 strike jets from RAF Lakenheath in England to bomb targets in Libya. A few weeks later, 'Ace', a PAC agent I was controlling, sent me an urgent message intimating that he had important information. In the past he had provided me with sensitive information relating to both the PAC and ANC/MK in and around Gaberone and Francistown. He had also, at times, acted as a courier for these organisations, passing their documents on to me for photocopying before continuing his journey to deliver their mail. Meeting Ace was never a waste of time.

His story was fascinating. He claimed that Colonel Gaddafi[72] had dispatched a Sudanese hit squad to Botswana to ambush and kill members of the SAS training team.

This was apparently a reprisal for the Tripoli bombing, as the British had allowed the Americans to launch their attack from an English airbase. Of even greater concern was his claim that the hit squad had obtained South African army uniforms (complete with boots and weapons). This pseudo-operation was to be carried out in the hope that the killings would be blamed on South Africa which would once again find itself in the international dock, no matter how many protestations of innocence were made. I listened in silence, and then asked Ace to provide proof of what he had told me.

"I really can't believe you," he shouted angrily. "I've made an excuse to leave Botswana at great risk and come to South Africa to tell you things I know are true. Now you want proof! What do you expect me to do, kidnap one of the guys and bring him to you as evidence?"

"Okay, Ace, calm down," I said. "I'm not saying it isn't true, but to have anyone believe me I'll have to produce something to validate it. Can you give me the address where they're holed up? I can get someone else to check it out—with no danger of compromising you. You have my word."

"Fuck you! Ace screamed. "Are all you whites so fucking stupid? Don't you realise what will happen if they shoot an Englishman in Botswana? Frankly, I don't care if they

kill every Englishman in the country! They are only interested in Botswana's mineral resources. You're supposed to be such a great fucking spy, I thought you would be happy to get this information."

The situation had become rather tense, so I ended the debriefing, promising Ace I would take care of the information he had provided.

I also knew that I had dropped considerably in his estimation.

I wondered how I was going to handle his information. I certainly couldn't discuss it with Laurel and Hardy as they had no idea what I was up to. Nor could I discuss it with Colonel Nel—it would go straight over his head. I decided instead to confide in Marietta.

Between the two of us we agreed that the best way to handle it was for her to send an intelligence tasking to Subsection 'C', intimating that there was a rumour of such an intended action and asking for intelligence that would confirm or refute the story. In retrospect, this was really all she could have done. When this intelligence requirement arrived at the office shortly afterwards, I wasn't told anything about it. I merely heard Laurel mutter to Hardy that such an action sounded great as it would mean a few less Englishmen in Africa. I knew this was partly aimed at me.

I took the only course of action I could think of.

One of my star Botswana agents was a British businessman with outstanding access to the BDF's General Staff. Although he was old enough to be my father, 'George' had become a really good friend. He had initially been recruited by Colonel Nel and then handed over for me to control. I suspected that George was linked to MI6[73] and using South Africa as a safe base from which to operate. This didn't particularly concern me as long as he helped and didn't show too much interest in what I was doing. Intelligence work takes place in a never ending haze of smoke and mirrors.

I asked George for an urgent meeting and told him about the tip-off which I explained had come to me from an agent.

"How reliable is your source?" a surprised George asked.

"Very reliable," I said. "I believe you should contact someone who can get a message to the SAS. I cannot confirm the information but I'm sure they'll be able to. After you get the message through to them, I'd like to know who you gave it to, just in case there's a screw up."

Before he left, I said, "One last thing George…I've recorded this meeting so if anyone gets hurt or killed I'll be able to prove that you had prior knowledge. And lastly, let me remind you that this information has absolutely nothing to do with ANC operations, so it's really not much use to me at all."

"You little shit," he said, shaking his head but smiling.

George knew what was at stake and I'm sure he'd have done the same had our roles been reversed—or so I hoped.

Two days later George phoned me.

"Fraser Browne sends his greetings and thanks you for the birthday card."

That message confirmed that George had got the message through to the British and I breathed a silent sigh of relief.

I had begun to really enjoy life as an agent handler. I didn't care for Laurel and Hardy and they cared even less for me, but this gave me the scope to broaden my horizons in the intelligence game. Certain things alarmed me, though.

George contacted me shortly afterwards and repaid me with information from his principles in the UK. According to him, a senior National Party politician was on the KGB's[74] payroll. The Soviets had apparently hit pay dirt with him after having recruited him in a Nordic country. He had, according to George, been easily subverted long before due to his expensive lifestyle which included a variety of mistresses and plenty of alcohol. It seemed he had betrayed South Africa on numerous occasions, frequently passing vital information to his Soviet handlers. The Brits had been on to him for some time, George told me.

I submitted an intelligence report on George's information the moment I returned to my office. The very next day two senior officers from MI's Counter Intelligence Division paid me a visit and demanded to know my source's identity. I refused to tell them. After some threats and a warning about keeping the information strictly to myself, the officers removed my copies of the intelligence report and cautioned me to cease reporting on the named politician.

"I can't do that," I said. "It's my job to report what my agents tell me—not to analyse it, even if that means stepping on some influential toes if I pick up something I deem important. If you don't like what my agents report, then you'd better have me fired."

"You have been warned," they repeated.

"Yes, I heard you. Now you can report back to your seniors and tell them you have warned me," I retorted.

"Fuck you very much and have a good day," I said as I closed my office door on their backs.

Eventually my relationship with the DCI's Counter Intelligence Operations (CI Ops) improved and I began to help them with their recruitments and covert surveillance operations. In return, they let me use their staff to video record some of my recruitments.

This cosy relationship lasted until I left the DCC.

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Several weeks later, a counter-espionage officer from MI's CI Ops[75] division, Helgaard Lombard, got in touch with me. I was acquainted with him and considered him trustworthy so I accepted his request to meet and discuss a sensitive problem over a cup of coffee.

Helgaard had been tasked to recruit and run agents inside foreign embassies in South Africa. His primary aim was to identify South Africans passing military information to foreign governments via their embassies. His secondary task was to identify so-called diplomats working as intelligence officers under diplomatic cover along with their 'deep cover nets' (foreign agents who had burrowed their way into the fabric of South African society and were reporting back to their controllers).

Helgaard told me he had the permission of his superiors to ask for my help. I felt flattered.

"I need to recruit someone within the US Embassy urgently," he confided. "Preferably someone well established who knows the procedures. It would be a bonus if they could provide us with intelligence on what they are up to or act as a talent spotter for us. Can you help?"

He and I both knew that the US and the UK were hard at work trying to get the Nationalist Party to abdicate power to the black majority ANC.[76] I told him I believed I could identify and recruit such a person, but that it would take time. I would also need the full support and backup of CI Ops who, among other things, would need to clear my involvement with my DCC section commander. I was already having enough trouble with Laurel and Hardy and didn't need to add another issue. Colonel At Nel gave his authorisation and the operation got under way.

In casual conversation several weeks later, a colleague (also a case officer in DCC) told me that his mother's best friend did 'very sensitive' work for the American Embassy; the two of them had known each other for many years and regularly went out for dinner or visited one another for drinks.

My ears pricked up. This was my lucky break. I had been battling to identify a suitable candidate for recruitment. I asked 'Manfred' to introduce me to his mother.

We met and using her as my talent spotter, I built up a good profile on the target. Manfred's mother remained blissfully unaware of what we were really intending to do with her friend.

I finally called Helgaard and set up a meeting to discuss progress and arrange the support I needed from his section. I also got permission from CI Ops to bring in a 'tame' psychologist to analyse the candidate and assist with stage-setting prior to the recruitment.

We were keenly aware of how sensitive the operation was. I would only get one chance to make my pitch. Finally, after several weeks of careful planning, deliberating, wargaming the recruitment, and establishing covers and communication systems, we were ready to enter the final phase of this delicate and tricky recruitment.

Before starting, I got permission from CI Ops to conduct a false-flag operation, the aim being to recruit the agent in the name of another foreign intelligence service with a view to protecting our own services if she was caught or compromised. I opted for the Union Jack.

We were aware that we were creating a situation fraught with international ramifications. The consequences of failure—particularly if it was revealed that South African Military Intelligence was involved—were too severe to contemplate. I decided to conduct the false flag recruitment personally so that I would be able to protect the operation if anything went wrong. This would also pre-empt rivalry from the National Intelligence Service who might feel that the operation poached on their terrain.

The plan depended on creating the perception within the target that she would be cooperating with Britain's MI6 with the full knowledge of the CIA[77] section at the American embassy. Meanwhile, our tame psychologist had provided valuable feedback on

the profile information we had compiled. I had decided that he would play an active role in the build up to the recruitment.

Our potential agent was a divorced mother who, apart from being cash-strapped, had firm faith in fortune-tellers, horoscopes, numerology, and the like. On the negative side (from our point of view) she was intensely loyal to her American employers and to the US. All indications were that she would refuse to cooperate in any way with the South African intelligence services. In fact, I was certain she would report any approach we made. My cover would be my only protection and I couldn't afford to make any mistakes.

Through careful manipulation of her superstitions and the prevailing situation, we were able to persuade her to visit a fortune-teller (our tame psychologist). His task was to make her believe that good things would come her way if she believed and played her cards right.

First he told her that she would be involved in a car accident; but it would be a minor one.[78] Then he suggested that she was about to play a very important role in safeguarding the organisation[79] she worked for and told her that she would soon find herself in a position to use some very deep secrets—secrets only she knew—to benefit her employers. He stressed, however, that the situation would be a very sensitive one and that she was not to discuss it with anyone as that would ruin her future.

He went on to tell her that her lucky number was 777 (she had once confided this to Manfred's mother) and that this numerical combination would feature strongly in bringing good fortune her way. She could also expect to meet someone (me) who would discreetly alleviate any financial difficulties she might have.

The future that our psychologist had predicted would come true far sooner than 'Cynthia' expected. Shortly afterwards she was involved in a minor car accident on her way to work at the US embassy. The damage to her car was so slight that she was willing to brush of the incident as inconsequential but the driver of the other car (one of my support agents) nevertheless apologised profusely, offered to have her car repaired (she refused), drive her to work (she refused), and take her to lunch (she refused).

I couldn't help wondering what was going through her mind.

Manfred's mother had by then been recruited as a witting support agent. When Helgaard of CI Ops questioned her, she gave detailed and precise feedback about the thoughts Cynthia had been willing to share with her.

We were sure she had taken the bait.

We set up the final phase of the operation at the Holiday Inn in Beatrix Street, Pretoria, several days later. Using a plan based on subterfuge and manipulation, Cynthia was guided towards the meeting, most likely wondering whether the hopes she had been harbouring since her visit to the fortune teller were about to become reality.

My room at the Holiday Inn had been carefully prepared by Helgaard and his counter-espionage team who had rigged it with covert video cameras and microphones. They were holed up in the room next door to monitor the recruitment, provide me with backup if I needed it, and do damage-control if things went wrong. Cynthia's surprise and excitement were palpable when she saw that the room number was 777.

Using an alias and false identification papers to authenticate who I claimed to be, I told her that I was an MI6 operative working very closely with the CIA and that I had been tasked to conduct routine monitoring on matters of interest to HM Government and the Office of the President of the United States. Cynthia's eyes lit up and she literally swelled with pride when I told her she had been specially selected because someone in the US Embassy had recommended her as 'loyal to a fault, utterly dependable, and totally discreet'. Thinking that at last someone had recognised her fine qualities, her loyalty, and the good work she was doing, she swallowed my story hook, line and sinker and was anxious to know how she could help.

I explained that someone, either inside or outside of the US Embassy, was passing highly classified intelligence to the South African authorities. Such breaches of security could not be tolerated and it was vital that we determine who that person was. I had been called in to assist the CIA because an unknown non-CIA operative would attract less attention. I told her that I would be monitoring all US agents operating in South Africa to determine which of them were acting as double agents, and downplayed the role of MI6 as incidental. In her mind, she was about to get involved in a top-secret highly-sensitive operation for the welfare of the US Embassy in South Africa—certainly nothing to do with the South African intelligence services.

I debriefed her that same evening. Being well placed in the embassy she had access to the sensitive data that Helgaard and his section needed but beyond that, she was a hive of information. It occurred to me that Helgaard and his team in the next room must have been stunned because she poured out information that CI Ops hadn't even considered or dreamt of. She was truly an intelligence goldmine.

At the end of the evening I thanked Cynthia for her help and gave her a large sum of money which she signed for. Her signature would later be used against her if the need ever arose. I told her that 'we' would contact her in a few days to speak to her again, and discussed the communications channels, how she was to contact us in case of an emergency, the need for absolute secrecy and so forth. I even gave her an additional emergency channel back to 'my office in England' in case she needed to speak to me urgently.

I could see that Cynthia was proud of her performance. She had unwittingly commenced her role as an agent for MI's counter-espionage operations.

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By mid-1988, several of my colleagues and I had become totally disillusioned with the situation the SADF had found itself in as a political pawn for the National Party government. I knew that I was on a one-way road to nowhere: I wasn't an Afrikaner, I didn't belong to the Dutch Reformed Church, and I had been known to question orders when I believed they went against what I naively considered to be the code of the soldier. I was also not a National Party supporter, nor was I ever likely to be invited to join the Broederbond, a secret Afrikaner society that took care of its own. I believed that it was indeed a miracle that I had attained the rank of major. I was, nevertheless, proud to have

been a soldier, despite my concerns about the manner in which the SADF was being used to further personal political aims and business interests.

The country was in a state of near-civil war but the politicians had continued to assure everyone that the war against terrorism would be fought to the end. Meanwhile, they were planning escape strategies behind everyone's backs. Strikes, riots, and demonstrations continued throughout South Africa. A State of Emergency was re-proclaimed on 10 June and the situation appeared to be getting worse—not improving as the politicians claimed. In its efforts to force a speedy change in South Africa, the international community tightened the sanctions and disinvestment noose.

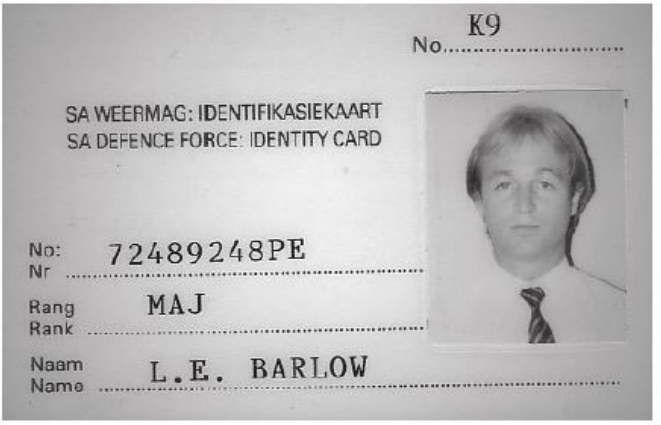
The SADF was still heavily engaged in battles in Angola, trying to destroy SWAPO's PLAN, its bases, and its logistical lines, and fighting the Angolan army (FAPLA), the Cubans, and the Russians. As had become almost normal, international condemnation followed each of the SADF's actions.

Shortly thereafter I was transferred to a newly-established section in the DCC known as 'Section Terrorism', established to gather intelligence on terrorist organisations that posed a threat to South Africa. It was a commonplace strategy, in Military Intelligence, to solve a section's inability to gather intelligence by starting another section. I knew that Laurel and Hardy were happy to see me go and I was delighted no longer to have to share an office with those clowns. Section Terrorism soon became known as DCC Terr.

I spent a few enjoyable months working under the command of Colonel Horace Doncaster. My immediate superior was Commandant Anton Niewoudt, with whom I got along well. Anton gave me a free hand and didn't appear to care that I was English speaking. He was also an ex-armour officer and an experienced and professional intelligence operator who ran an efficient subsection, but like me, he was concerned about the way South Africa's politicians were handling the deteriorating political situation in the country and regarded our political masters as the root of all evil.

My task was to identify, recruit, and run agents engaged in terrorist activities. On one occasion I travelled to England to locate and recruit an old 32 Battalion friend of mine who had retired there.

As occurs in any such organisation as DCC Terr, I made friends as well as enemies and suffered the downs along with the ups. In general, though, I became disillusioned with the way we were operating: gathering intelligence, often at considerable risk to our agents, but subsequently taking no follow-on action whatsoever. I was also concerned about the bumbling of the politicians who seemed intent on waging war without leaving any room for negotiations. At one stage, out of sheer frustration, I seriously considered tendering my resignation in the belief that we were simply wasting time and money. Anton persuaded me to bite the bullet and stay on.



The author's Military Intelligence identity card. Was the 'K9' a portent of what was to come after he left Military Intelligence?

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Sometime later, a friend of mine in Special Forces invited me for coffee. Captain Chris Nel was an energetic intelligence officer with whom I had often secretly liaised, giving him information that Special Forces operatives might require. He had reciprocated by sharing intelligence with me.

He told me that someone in Special Forces had been following my career in the DCC since leaving 32 Battalion.

"How would you like to work under deep cover?" he asked.

"Well, I'm supposed to be under cover now, but I must admit it's a pretty flimsy cover to say the least."

"Have you ever heard of the Civil Cooperation Bureau—we call it the CCB?" he continued.

I hadn't but Chris enlightened me. In essence it was a mutation of Project Barnacle (through Gray, I knew about Project Barnacle) and its mission was to identify, locate, and neutralise enemies of the State. It was so secret that most Special Forces operators knew nothing of its existence. Chris told me that I had been identified as a potential regional commander for the organisation. He had been instructed to tell me that my area of responsibility would be Europe and the Middle East if I accepted the offer.

"That sounds right up my street," I said, "so what do I have to do to join this unit?" "Resign from the SADF," said Chris, "and the Boss says you must do it in such a way that they'll never want you back. Then, after a few weeks of decontamination, someone will contact you for a meeting and you'll be formally recruited into the organisation."

"What happens if I resign and no one bothers to contact me?" I asked, "I will have screwed myself completely, especially if I leave the army under a cloud of dust." "I act as a talent spotter for the CCB and even my SSO [Senior Staff Officer] isn't aware of this," said Chris. "If I drop you, you could probably blow my role in the CCB and I would be up shit creek without a paddle. If you are interested I'm afraid you'll just have to take me at my word. The CCB will only contact you after you have resigned and left the DCC."

I would have had to be really stupid just to leave the SADF without knowing what I would be getting in return. What would my job prospects be? Would I really be making a difference? Would I earn less than I was getting at the DCC? Where would I be working from? I had a lot of questions that needed answers.

"What is the Boss like?" I asked.

"He's an experienced Special Forces operator who does things his own way," said Chris, "he doesn't take shit from anyone. If you decide to come across, keep your mouth shut and your nose clean and he'll back you to the hilt. If you don't, he'll be the first to crucify you."

"Sounds fair."

Chris went on to say that I would be appointed at a higher salary than I was getting and that I would be required to burrow my way into some sort of deep cover. If I was really concerned about the way the war was being conducted, the CCB would be the ideal place for me to fight from.

I realised that Chris was buttering up my ego but I was also disillusioned and sick of the DCC. His approach was well-timed and his offer was exactly what I needed to re-energise and re-motivate myself.

"If you tell me you accept, I'll give you a contact phone number and you can let me know when you've resigned. Someone will contact you within two weeks after you leave the DCC," he promised. "Meanwhile, place all your agents on ice.[80] You may need them again."

"Okay, consider it done," I said as we parted.

I drafted my resignation and handed it to Anton. He wasn't surprised, but I like to think he was somewhat disappointed about my decision. He arranged for me to discuss my resignation with Colonel Doncaster who tried to persuade me to retract it until I said I was sick of the incompetence reigning in the DCC, that I could no longer stomach the lack of drive in the organisation, and that I was no longer prepared to work with and for clowns. I knew those comments would put an immediate end to my career in the Directorate of Covert Collection and in the South African army.

They did.

A clearly angry Doncaster arranged my immediate transfer to the South African Military Intelligence College where I would cool my heels lecturing on intelligence matters while my resignation was processed. While there, and despite my resignation, I was promoted to the rank of commandant (lieutenant colonel). Once again, it was not through any stroke of brilliance but simply because my time for promotion had arrived.

Meanwhile, I contacted my agents and told them to 'go to sleep' until they heard from me again.

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Learning that I had resigned my commission, Nico Palm, an ex-Citizen Force[81] sapper officer who had been badly wounded in Angola while clearing a minefield under fire, and subsequently been head-hunted as a product development officer by Armscor,[82] contacted me and asked if I would be interested in continuing to assist Armscor.

Nico, whose field of expertise was explosives, had previously approached me and asked me to help with the importation of a UN-embargoed explosive charge known as 'Dartcord'. I had thought the day might come when I would need to call on him for assistance and we had agreed to help each other where possible. Nico never asked what I was doing or who I was working for, but he probably assumed I was engaged in covert activities on behalf of the state.

At about the same time I had recruited a support agent by the name of 'Brian Mellor' who ran an import-export company.

I decided it would be productive to introduce Nico to Brian. To assist in concluding this transaction we turned to 'Roger Kent', a dapper ex-British army cavalry officer who ran a business dealing in 'hard-to-find' items that the South African Army required but couldn't get because of the international arms embargo. Between them, Brian and Roger secured the Dartcord and shipped two container loads of the explosive to South Africa via Portugal. Armscor considered this a major achievement. After expressing his gratitude for my help, Brian had asked if I would like to work with him.

"I don't know much about the business world, Brian," I had answered. "Perhaps later I might change my mind, but thanks for the offer."

"With your contacts and my business sense we could do pretty well together. Think about it."

Roger hadn't known that I was a South African intelligence officer (at least I hoped he hadn't), but he appeared to be positively disposed towards South Africa. We became good friends after the Dartcord operation. I also maintained regular contact with Brian Mellor.

Nico believed that South Africa was wasting untold millions importing specialised products that could be manufactured locally and far cheaper. If this could be properly planned and coordinated, the SADF would no longer be held hostage to the international arms embargo on certain products. I agreed to get involved, knowing that I would soon be required to build a decent cover for my new life in the Civil Cooperation Bureau.

Nico introduced me to Dr Bingo Kruger and 'Witte' van Heerden. Kruger, Van Heerden, and I established a close corporation called Geo International Trading cc. The modus operandi would be for Nico to ask Geo International Trading for quotations on specific items—a standard Armscor procedure known as a Request for Quotation (RFQ). We would then identify local manufacturers willing to make the products and submit our

quotation to Armscor. If Armscor accepted our proposal, we would be in business. It seemed like a perfect cover to me.

Meanwhile, I lectured at the Military Intelligence College. I was also tasked to develop a specialist intelligence course for selected Special Forces operators. I presented this training at Walmansthall, then the home base of 44 Parachute Brigade within which there was an isolated area used by Special Forces.

Then came the bad news. It appeared that my letter of resignation had been misplaced. On 24 February 1989, I resigned for the second time.

On 30 March 1989, force number 72489248PE, Commandant LE Barlow (South African Military Intelligence, unit affiliation 32 Battalion), Chief Instructor, General Training Branch of the South African Military Intelligence College, walked through the unit's gates for the last time and became ordinary Mister Barlow.

My life was about to change dramatically.

04:

My Life as a 'Civil Cooperator'

Armed forces and intelligence services around the world (both East and West) have engaged in smoke-and-mirror operations for many decades.

In his novel, Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy, John le Carre argued, 'The Expression of a nation's subconscious is its secret service'. Between the end of World War II in 1945 and the early 1990s the CIA and MI6 played the game of secret intelligence for the highest stakes imaginable. They were continually pitted against the Soviet KGB,[83] GRU,[84] and their satellite agencies in a struggle to protect and preserve opposing ideologies, and it was not only a battle of wits involving spy against spy; when occasion demanded it, lives were also taken.

The SAS[85] is kept under the tight control of the British Home Office—not the army. Likewise, the British security services MI5 (internal security) and MI6 (external security) also fall under Home Office control, with the SAS as their executive or military arm. This highly specialised unit has carried out numerous spectacular actions in defence of the realm, some of which have resulted in controversy and condemnation—especially from those they have targeted.

On 6 March 1988 an SAS operation known as Operation Flavius led to the sanctioned killing of three IRA (Irish Republican Army) suspects in Gibraltar. The three were regarded as enemies of Her Majesty's government, and action was being taken to neutralise what MI5 believed was a pending IRA[86] car bomb attack in broad daylight. The SAS had been tasked to arrest the three suspects who were believed to be armed and dangerous, but gunned them down when it appeared they were making 'threatening movements'. In the event, they turned out to be unarmed.

In some quarters the incident was viewed as nothing short of sanctioned murder but the operators involved were cleared of any wrongdoing. The old adage, 'the best form of defence is attack,' appeared to have been implemented. It is an adage I agree with.

In the Middle East during the same period the Israeli and Arab intelligence services were engaged in a continuous struggle for their very existence—a struggle that continues to this day. Using overt, clandestine, and covert military actions to back-up political ideologies and strategies, both sides conducted operations aimed at neutralising and demoralising the opposition. While the passing decades were occasionally interrupted by fierce and bitter shooting wars, these were merely brief interludes in the secret state of permanent war that existed between the opposing countries. When the soldiers retired to barracks, their intelligence agencies remained in place beyond the fighting lines, continually active in their missions—missions that have never been limited to intelligence gathering only.

France's Service de Documentation Exterieure de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE) has for many years been working in the shadowy world of intelligence and covert operations. In the eyes of the international community, its most controversial operation was the destruction of Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior in 1985. Registered in Scotland and docked in Auckland Harbour, New Zealand, The Rainbow Warrior was about to embark on a protest voyage to the French nuclear testing site at Moruroa Atoll. Wanting to avoid negative publicity against their nuclear programme, the French took drastic action. One of the crew members, Fernando Pereira (a Portuguese draft dodger) was killed in the explosion and two of the French operatives responsible were arrested. France agreed to pay compensation of NZ$13 million. They also offered an official apology in exchange for the two operatives in custody and claimed they would be made to serve out their sentences at the French military base on Hao Atoll. Many in the media regarded the two French operatives as state-sanctioned international terrorists. They had been released from custody by 1988.

America's CIA probably holds the prize for gross excesses that have become public and its web of intelligence and covert operations extends around the globe.

The removal of Marxist President Salvador Allende of Chile in 1973 and the many unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro are but two examples. The US uses the CIA and its sister intelligence agencies to expand the American web of influence and protect her foreign interests wherever and whenever it is deemed necessary.

Neither has Israel's Mossad recoiled from political assassinations. In 1955 President Gamal Nasser of Egypt adopted the Palestinian cause as his own. On his instructions, 700 men were given military training by Egyptian instructors. They were called fedayeen—an ancient and honourable name given to those of the Muslim faithful willing to sacrifice their lives for their cause. They went into action for the first time on 25 August 1955, conducting nightly cross-border raids from Jordan into Israel. They attacked vehicles and buildings, blew up radio transmitters, laid ambushes and mines, killed five Israeli soldiers and seventeen civilians, and wounded another twenty.

Mossad discovered that Nasser had personally tasked Lieutenant Colonel Mustapha Hafez (the Egyptian Chief of Intelligence in the Gaza Strip) to train the fedayeen and orchestrate their attacks. In July 1956 Mossad killed Hafez with a parcel bomb. His death left Colonel Salah Mustapha (the Egyptian military attaché in Amman) in charge of the fedayeen.

Shortly afterwards Mustapha received a parcel containing the newly published memoirs of German Field Marshall Gerd Von Rundstedt.[87]

He opened the parcel in his car and triggered an explosive device that killed him.

In 1962, Mossad discovered that Egypt's Nasser had recruited several former Nazi scientists and technicians (left in Germany after the Americans and Soviets had selected the best at the end of World War II) and started a programme to manufacture nuclear bombs and perfect rocket technology so he could attack Israel. Mossad sent them unsigned letters that politely warned them to leave Egypt or they would be killed. Some left but Mossad, under Operation Damocles (indicating that the Sword of Damocles was hanging

over their heads) began to target both the remaining scientists and others in Germany who were engaged in procuring material needed for the programmes. At least six were killed and several others wounded.

Major General Oleg Kalugin, the former KGB Chief of Counter Intelligence would later recall that he too had taken part in "what we call in the business a 'wet job'—an assassination" and mentioned having been involved in the assassination of Georgi Markov. Markov had defected from Bulgaria to the United Kingdom where he had used the BBC's Bulgarian radio service to beam back strong criticism of the Bulgarian regime and communism. His assassination was accomplished by means of a poisoned umbrella.[88]

The South Africa Bureau of State Security (BOSS) had its own equivalent to the CCB known as the 'Z Squad'. Its existence was compromised by former BOSS agent Gordon Winter who stated that its first actions had been carried out in 1974. Another former BOSS agent, Martin Dolinchek, also confirmed the Z Squad's existence. BOSS directed the Z Squad using its own intelligence. I had been aware of the Z Squad's existence since BOSS' attempt to recruit me in 1982.

CCB regions were similarly responsible for gathering their own intelligence and taking subsequent actions.

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In March 1989, shortly before I was due to start my new career with the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB), I was contacted by Michael Collins, a UK-based agent I had been running while still with DCC Section Terr. Collins was a serving member of the domestic British Security Service (MI5). We had become good friends, and I knew from past operations that his information was reliable. He warned me that MI5 had become aware of an impending South African operation to 'steal' a missile from a British Army base and smuggle it to South Africa. At that time, he didn't know what type of missile was being targeted and for obvious reasons, we did not discuss cricket and other unimportant issues on the telephone.

Hovering as I was in a sort of no-man's-land between MI, from which I had just resigned, and the CCB, to which I was pending entry, I had no one to report this to. I knew, however, that I could not ignore it. Someone had to be warned and something had to be done. South Africa was already buckling under sanctions from the West, and could not afford to exacerbate its status as a pariah state—not to mention the international embarrassment if this became public. I held no particular brief for Armscor, but I realised the political ramifications of their actions if their purported missile stealing operation was compromised.

I contacted Nico Palm of Armscor, told him what I had heard, and then phoned again a couple of days later to ask what Armscor's reaction had been and what was being done. He had been admonished and told to keep his nose out of the Foreign Procurement Division's affairs who, it seemed, had become a law unto themselves.

I called him again on about 25 March.

"Nico, the information I have is now very specific. Someone from South Africa is apparently attempting to steal a Blowpipe surface-to-air missile[89] from somewhere in the UK and smuggle it back to South Africa. I am rather concerned; it seems as though the Brits are already onto the plan. There are also rumours that South Africa is willing to pay £1 million for the damn thing."

Palm told me that he couldn't do much other than to report the information that came to him. Armscor's Foreign Procurement Division had apparently not shown much interest in what he'd had to tell them. If anything, they had simply ignored it. More likely, they probably thought no one would ever catch them.

"Well, I sure as hell hope whoever is planning this operation knows what they're doing," I said.

It alarmed me greatly that Armscor seemed willing to compromise South Africa and its armed forces by ignoring credible intelligence. I was also uneasy about their decision to buy or steal a missile that had performed so dismally during the Falklands War that I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to pay that amount of money for it. Most worrying was the fact that Armscor had additionally turned down the offer of a consignment of far superior US Stinger[90] missiles.

To even consider stealing the useless Blowpipe technology so that it could be reverse engineered and then used to equip South African soldiers bordered on the ludicrous—unless someone, somewhere was going to derive a hidden financial benefit from the transaction. The thought even entered my mind that perhaps someone didn't want the SADF to have a good surface-to-air missile as such a weapon would cut short the on-going war in Angola.

Despite his hands being tied by Armscor's bureaucracy, Nico asked me to continue giving him feedback and undertook to continue informing his superiors on the matter.

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A few days after my resignation had taken effect, I received the call I was waiting for. My new life as a CCB operative was about to begin. I was excited at the possible future prospects the CCB promised, and I was looking forward to getting off my backside and facing the challenge. Being an unsoldiering soldier had been very difficult for me.

A meeting was arranged with Colonel Joe Verster, the managing director and commander of the CCB, and Henk Coetzee, one of his officers. We met in a dingy hotel room in Pretoria later that evening. The meeting was brief and to the point. I had never met Colonel Verster but I had heard of him from Chris Nel, and understood that he was a competent and experienced commander with a very different way of doing things.

The top-secret CCB appeared nowhere on the SADF's organisational charts, and only select Special Forces operators[91] knew of its existence. It was registered as a proprietary limited company (the Civil Cooperation Bureau (Pty) Ltd) to create distance between itself and the SADF, and its mission was to covertly gather strategic and tactical intelligence for Special Forces' operations. It was authorised to engage targets of

opportunity and other targets of strategic or tactical value, and also to take whatever actions were deemed appropriate (assassinations, snatch operations, disinformation, and whatever other means could be used to neutralise the enemy) but only with official sanction unless that was impracticable.

When I first met Joe Verster, the Chairman of the CCB was a Major General Eddie Webb, the new General Officer Commanding Special Forces. Webb had replaced General Joep Joubert. As the CCB's Director, Joe Verster was the 'man on the ground' who actually ran the organisation. His deputy was Colonel Dawie Fourie, another experienced Special Forces officer with a good reputation.

The CCB was divided into ten regions:

Region 1: Botswana
Region 2: Mozambique and Swaziland Region 3: Lesotho
Region 4: Angola, Zambia, and Tanzania
Region 5: United Kingdom and Europe, including the Middle East
Region 6: South Africa
Region 7: Zimbabwe
Region 8: South West Africa/Namibia
Region 9: Not a geographical region, but responsible for supplying support to the intelligence department.
Region 10: Also not a geographical region, but responsible for providing financial and administrative support to the CCB.

In theory, each region was supposed to have a commander/manager, a deputy manager, and fourteen operatives[92] along with secretaries, and other support personnel. I was to find out that the theory (which I wasn't told about) didn't always translate into practice—at least as insofar as my appointment, my region, and my pending mission were concerned.

"I'm aware of some of the operations you've been involved in. Either you're a good actor or you're genuinely fearless," Verster said to me before explaining the terms of my employment.

"You will be known by the administrative name of Oliver Johnson.

"You will establish yourself in deep cover and use your cover to generate finances for your operations. You will report to me via a coordinator named Mike and I will also task you through him. Should you have a need to discuss urgent matters you can contact Henk if Mike is unavailable. You are being appointed as the commander of Region 5 which covers the United Kingdom, Europe and the Middle East. As the regional commander you will hold the equivalent rank of colonel.

"Your mission will be threefold: You will infiltrate or penetrate the enemy's organisations through the use of agents. You will disseminate the intelligence you and your agents gather through your coordinator. You will neutralise the enemy by conducting specific specialist operations that the other elements of Special Forces cannot partake in for whatever reason.

"You will recruit and set up your own agent networks and conduct these covert operations for the benefit of the state, particularly Special Forces. You must establish the best possible cover for yourself. You are a professional soldier so you know what is expected of you. Do your job and I'll cover your arse as best I can. I want you to get the show on the road within the next two weeks so there's a lot of work to be done."

Verster furthermore informed me that the establishment of Region 5 was viewed as a 'long-term' project. What exactly 'long term' meant, he did not say and I didn't ask. Despite being somewhat overwhelmed by what he'd told me, I accepted my brief.

He went on to tell me that my SADF pension would continue with the CCB but under a different pension fund that was not connected to the SADF. I signed my new pension fund contract which stated that I would be compensated to a value in excess of a million Rands if I saw out my time in the CCB—or if the CCB was ever closed down.[93]

Verster finally warned me that if I was compromised or caught during any operation, the South African government and the SADF/Special Forces would both deny all knowledge of my existence, and I would be left on my own to take whatever was coming to me. We shook hands and I left the hotel. I was now officially a member of an organisation that officially didn't exist.

Verster's instructions had been somewhat vague. He had left me with the impression that I would be a lone operative in a large region which seemed to comprise only myself with either Mike or Henk to work through as report back channels. I hoped he had done that purely to scare me, and still thought I would be able to get in touch with the men under my command through Mike—assuming they existed.

I realised that I would be responsible for my own security and I most certainly had no intention of ever being caught. I was also confident that Verster could question neither my ability nor my loyalty towards the SADF.

In later years, I would learn that there had been CCB operatives active in London before I was recruited. According to some, Johan Niemoller had been coordinating operations there in 1987, but he was suddenly withdrawn following the arrests of a number of individuals living in England on charges of plotting to kill ANC leaders.

I would only learn much later that the CCB's complex web was made even more confusing by the strange terminology used to describe its actions. For example, I was apparently an 'overt' member, being a civilian operative who supposedly had no discernible military mandate—but I was engaged in covert operations. On the other hand, my agents were known as 'coverts'—civilians who were supposedly unsure who they were really working for.

As 'overts' we were required to have a Blue Plan which provided our cover, and a Red Plan which outlined our operational activities in line with the CCB's objectives. The 'coverts' were to be recruited for their skills and their access to information. Good hitmen, cat burglars, forgers, and the like were ideal candidates, and my job was to find them and employ them to the CCB's benefit. Not only would they be encouraged to commit their criminal deeds, we would pay them as well, but if things went wrong, we would deny all

knowledge of them. Such, however, is the nature of covert operations. If I couldn't find someone to do a job, I would have to do it myself.

To my mind, I was simply an operative working under the deepest cover I could create and maintain, and my 'coverts' were my agents, recruited by whatever means possible (false flags, coercion, or lies). In addition, there were 'inner circles' and 'outer circles' which were supposed to comprise 'overts' and 'coverts' respectively. During my short CCB career I drifted way beyond any of these circles as my designation fell somewhere between 'covert' and 'overt', something the CCB had apparently made no provision for. I believed my directive to be ambiguous and inflexible, and therefore decided to run my region as I saw fit.

I had a lot of work to do in order to commence my operations and I had only been given two weeks in which to prepare. My first step was to contact Mike, my coordinator, and determine what other operatives and agents ('overts' and 'coverts' in CCB-speak) if any, were available to me. I also needed to know whether any targets had been identified, what my priorities were to be, how I would access weapons and equipment, and how communications channels would be set up. I would then be in a position to activate the relevant DCC agents I had placed on ice.

I called the telephone number Colonel Verster had given me an hour after our meeting. "Hello," a voice answered.

"Hi, my name is Oliver. I believe you know about me..."

"Great, I've been expecting your call," Mike replied. "Why don't you take a drive to Krugersdorp in the morning? We'll have coffee and a chat. Take the Krugersdorp highway and call me when you're about five minutes out. I'll guide you to the meeting place."

"I hope the coffee is good. I'll see you tomorrow."

The next morning I called Mike and he guided me to an office from where he ran a financial brokering business as part of his cover. It was a small one-man operation but the office furnishings suggested it was profitable. Unfortunately, Mike hadn't learnt the secret of making good coffee.

We got along well for a first meeting. Mike wasn't a combat soldier—in fact he wasn't really a soldier at all; just someone who had given limited assistance to Special Forces and then been roped in by Verster. He was also an 'overt'. He and Henk would be my only links to the CCB and Verster and he would act as my final communications link to the 'Organisation' as he called it. I would supply reports and feedback to him and he would give me instructions, taskings, and limited financial assistance when necessary.

"Okay, when do I get to meet the rest of my team?" I asked.

"Sorry, you're on your own. You'll have to build up the Region as best you can." "Well that's bloody great. It's going to take time and money. I still have my old DCC agents on ice, I guess I could reactivate them. What about funding for operations?"

"You must be joking. Didn't the boss tell you? You're supposed to generate your own finances.[94] You're about to start a new region from scratch; no funds have been allocated. All we'll give you is enough cash to upgrade that rattletrap you're driving and buy some

new clothes. That's about it. The rest is up to you. Obviously, the establishment of Region 5 is a long-term operation that needs thorough planning."

"That hardly inspires confidence in this CCB set-up," I said.

Mike just laughed and began to brief me on what he saw as my objectives. I listened attentively while I tried to recover from the initial shock of having been thrown in at the deep end with little or no support.

Anyone who has worked in the field of intelligence operations knows that the aim of the collection operation—locating the elusive prize—is to determine the intentions of the enemy and thus be able to predict the 'what, where, when, how and why' of the enemy's next move. With that pre-knowledge, offensive covert operations aimed at effectively disrupting and neutralising the enemy can be launched.

Mike told me that, as a lone operative, despite my fancy CCB title, I would be expected to gather information on the ANC, the PAC, and the SACP and their fellow travellers in Europe and the Middle East, analyse that information, make use of its intelligence value, and plan my offensive operations accordingly.

I was extremely concerned. I thought my mission was an attempt at a poor joke that bordered on the ridiculously insane. As I was expected to do this on my own, without any support from the CCB, the joke had a bitter ring to it. I would do what I could but I had no illusions about the difficulty I would experience, and I told Mike so.

Mike again reiterated that Region 5 was a 'long-term project', and that I would most probably be given additional operators and support once I had created some sort of order in my region.

When he was done, I spent a few minutes making notes and then told him in brief what my plan of action was.

I would establish my cover. There was no reason why he should know what it was, but when I had it in place, I would contact him. Next, I would contact some of my old agents in Europe, reactivate them, and tell them to expect a meeting in the near future. Until then, they were to come out of hibernation and keep their ears to the ground. If I needed assistance, some of them would be able to provide me with weapons, explosives, vehicles, passports, and safe houses.

I would also set up communications channels between Europe and South Africa and establish emergency communications lines with Mike, who would contact Verster if it became necessary to get an urgent message through to the CCB.

Lastly, I would set up profit-generating companies in Europe to give me access to finances.

"That sounds good to me," said Mike, "I'll let the boss know what you'll be getting up to. Just don't get caught."

We arranged to maintain a twice-weekly contact schedule and created code phrases for the reports I would give on the progress I was making. We also arranged that my monthly salary from CCB would be paid directly to me by Mike.

To allay any fears I might have had about being compromised by CCB operatives from the other regions, Mike assured me that I would never meet anyone but himself, Colonel Verster, or Henk. Effectively, I would be screened off from the other regions and their

operatives. That gave me the assurance that I would not have to fear any betrayal or compromise from South Africa.

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On my way back to Pretoria I visited 'Brian Mellor', to see if he had been serious when he had offered me the post of managing director to his import-export business after the Dartcord operation. Aside from owning an import-export company, Brian was also a successful freelance wheeler-dealer who had shares in the mining industry, a management consultancy, and several other smaller businesses. He was also an all-round nice guy.

He had been serious, and a week later I was the Managing Director (MD) of Mellor Imports (Pty) Ltd, a company aimed at assisting Armscor in circumventing the UN arms embargo and generating whatever other business could be found.

An accountant by profession, Brian made sure I understood every detail of the import export business and I spent many nights studying the material he gave me to ensure that I didn't come across as a novice. It wasn't only for his benefit, however, that I wanted to run the company successfully. My cover would only be as good as my ability to do the job. Brian informed me that I would be travelling abroad a lot as he needed me to investigate, not only products that could be useful to the SADF, but also commercial products that could be sold into Africa. This suited me fine as it would give me a legitimate reason to travel to the UK and Europe frequently.

Being a partner in Geo International Trading (GIT) was an added bonus as it would allow me to focus on different products required by the military, thus creating two covers for myself. To make sure that I didn't find myself with a conflict of interest, I told Brian that I would deal only with equipment required for the ground forces and not for the air force. For GIT, on the other hand, I would focus only on products the air force might require, preferably for manufacture in South Africa. It was a complex situation and I would have to use my income from both companies to fund my CCB operations. One advantage was that no one knew I was working as a covert operative for Special Forces.

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On the night of 14 April 1989, I was again tipped off by Michael Collins on the developing Blowpipe saga. Collins expressed his concern that South Africa seemed to be pushing the envelope a little too hard. He also warned me that such an action would make things very difficult for any cooperation between South Africa and the UK in future.

"People shouldn't steal from their friends," he said.

I discussed the issue with my coordinator, Mike, early the following morning. I told him how the situation had unfolded, and mentioned that I had already informed Nico Palm of Armscor prior to my formal recruitment into CCB. In addition, I gave Mike the current status on the theft of the missile. We both agreed that I should continue to report whatever information I had on the Blowpipe directly to Nico as I had already tipped Armscor off via him. That would circumvent the CCB's line of communication into Armscor. In addition,

if we passed the information to Armscor via the CCB, it might well compromise both the organisation and my role in it.

On 15 April 1989, I called Nico again. Collins had contacted me to say that a Blowpipe missile had indeed been stolen from a British Army (Territorial) depot and was about to be—or had already been—shipped to Paris. The British and French Intelligence authorities were tracking the missile and a South African named 'Danny' was involved. Danny was later identified as Danie Storm, an Armscor official who operated from the South African embassy in Paris.

On about 19 April, I got new information and called Nico to pass it on.

"Nico, things are getting very serious now. Apparently the French police are about to conduct a raid and nail the people involved in this Blowpipe affair. I'm told they are planning to manipulate the situation in some manner and will take them down in a hotel in Paris. Please warn your people."

"I'll tell them again," Nico said. "But I've already been warned…if I don't stop talking about the Blowpipe they'll have me arrested."

I could scarcely believe what Nico was saying. If a deal was being done on the missile, it was already severely compromised and the Armscor officials involved must surely have known that. Dealing with the issue by threatening to arrest Nico was ridiculous.

"I'll bet you someone in Armscor will be getting a kickback when things go wrong," I said. "The Brits will also be thoroughly pissed off at South Africa, which is bound to have negative repercussions on the sanctions issue."

Years later I learnt that a Blowpipe missile had indeed been stolen from a British Army Territorial base in Northern Ireland on 12 April. The British had tracked it to France and then alerted the French authorities. On 23 April the French had raided a Paris hotel and arrested a South African embassy official, an American arms dealer, and three members of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA)—a right-wing Protestant paramilitary group. The UDA had been hoping to exchange the missile for South African weapons and equipment. This act of stupidity again placed South Africa in the centre of an international outcry and put Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher under immense pressure to review her stance on sanctions against us. Despite being aware that it was probably going to end up being a debacle, Armscor had doggedly refused to abandon the operation.

On 24 April, the matter was raised in the British House of Commons, where Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, responded to a question on the Blowpipe missile debacle as follows:[95]

We have been informed, by the French authorities, of the arrest in Paris of three United Kingdom citizens and one American on 21 April on charges of arms trafficking, receipt of stolen goods, and criminal conspiracy of a terrorist nature. Consular access is being sought to the three United Kingdom citizens.

The Government are seriously concerned at the implications of the charges brought by the French authorities. The matter is sub judice and it is extremely important not to prejudice the French legal proceedings in any way. The South African ambassador in

London was today summoned to the Foreign Office to be told of the grave view taken by the British Government of the implications of the charges and of the alleged involvement of a member of the South African embassy in Paris. The House will wish to be assured that since the initial reports of thefts in Northern Ireland became known, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been subjecting security arrangements at Shorts and other establishments in Northern Ireland to a most thorough review.

Howe then went on to make further comments on the debacle, but refused to be drawn in by any questions regarding SWAPO and the ANC having obtained SAM-7 missiles to shoot down South African aircraft. He also said that Britain would work tirelessly to remove apartheid from South Africa. Some in the house even stated that we, as South Africans, were the terrorists.
The Saoirse Irish Freedom would in November 1991, report that:

Three Loyalists arrested in Paris in 1989 were convicted on October 28 of trying to sell a Shorts blowpipe missile to apartheid South Africa. Noel Little, Samuel Quinn, and James King were arrested along with an American arms dealer with CIA links and a South African diplomat in the Paris Hilton Hotel while they were examing [sic] parts of a surface-to-air missile stolen from the Belfast Shorts factory. One of the Loyalists was a former missile instructor in the British army's reserve.

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Shortly after having started with the CCB I was phoned by Colonel Chris Prinsloo, the Senior Staff Officer Intelligence, Special Forces, who had asked me to develop the specialist intelligence course while I was still lecturing at the Military Intelligence College.

"Eeben, we have a problem," he said. "Now that you have left the College there is no one around to present that special course you developed for us. The results we got from the men you trained were very good. Do you think you would be able to continue?"

I told him I would, but not before establishing a company that, under South African law, was allowed to present such training courses. The function of the to-be- established company would be described as 'management training'.

"Ja, that sounds good to me. We also need several more programmes developed for our men. How about coming to see me tomorrow so we can discuss this? You can establish the company later."

The next morning I told Brian I would be coming in late and went to see Colonel Prinsloo at Special Forces Headquarters in Pretoria. He was a jovial man with a bristling moustache who had no idea that I had been appointed operational commander of the CCB's Region 5, and told me that the extraordinary times in which we were living called for extraordinary measures. The GOC Special Forces had given him the go-ahead to have a selected group of operators trained in covert intelligence gathering and operations. He

had given the course the title Hanorie 1—an Afrikaans acronym for Handler's Orientation, Part 1.

A day or two later, I submitted my proposal to Colonel Prinsloo. The subject content I proposed for his 3-week Hanorie 1 course covered the following in theory and practical:

An introduction to covert operations and covert information gathering (espionage)
- Covert operations terminology
- Covert operations planning cycle
- Agents, sources, case officers, and analysts
- Cover
- Identification and recruitment of agents
- Clandestine communications
- Psychological manipulation techniques
- Urban surveillance and counter-surveillance
- Urban evasion
- Offensive and defensive driving
- Counter-interrogation

My proposal was duly accepted and the first training programme was scheduled for later that month. I insisted that each student be given an alias for the duration of the course so as to prevent me from ever discovering their true identities. I would use the alias, 'Steven'. Colonel Prinsloo accepted my reasoning. In reality, I didn't want to know the true identities of the Special Forces students, believing that if ever I was captured in Europe or anywhere else, I would not be able to compromise Special Forces operatives. I spent many nights writing the new training notes and syllabus for the Special Forces Hanorie 1 programme.

Prinsloo also asked me to develop a series of additional training programmes to suit Special Forces' new operational requirements. Once trained, the operators would be returned to their units and await orders for any planned operation—there was no intention of forming a separate group outside of Special Forces. The trained operatives would be required to deploy from their regiments to engage in specialist covert operations at short notice.

Colonel Prinsloo had unknowingly provided me with an additional method of generating funds for my CCB operations. I decided to register a company and use it purely as an income generator and clearing house for the funds that would cover my CCB operational and other expenses. If I could keep the new entity at arm's length from the CCB, Mellor, and GIT, I would gain the necessary financial flexibility to exploit my cover to the hilt.

I registered Executive Outcomes (EO) as a close corporation in South Africa in 1989 without any financial or other assistance from the CCB, GIT, or Brian Mellor.[96] The Registrar of Companies in Pretoria must still hold the original registration documents. Conspiracy theorists, who in later years would write about EO extensively, never bothered to establish who had actually registered and started the company—or when. Instead, using

'creative journalism', they simply made up their own stories to diabolise the company's origins. I developed the intelligence tradecraft and covert operations aspects of the courses and brought in a partner (a clinical psychologist) to develop the psychological manipulation techniques that operators would be using. We based these on a field of psychology known as neuro- linguistic programming (NLP).

In an April 1994 article, Sid Jacobson described 'Neuro-Linguistic Programming' as follows:

NLP was developed in the early 1970s by Richard Bandier, PhD, an information scientist, and John Grinder, PhD, a linguist. Bandier and Grinder were interested in how people influence one another, and in the possibility of being able to duplicate the behaviour, and therefore the effectiveness of highly influential people. Their early research was conducted at the University of California at Santa Cruz. What made their search special was their use of technology from linguistics and information science, combined with insights from behavioural psychology and general systems theory, to unlock the secrets of highly effective communication.

The actual technology, or methodology, that Bandier and Grinder used is known as human modelling; actually the building of models of how people perform or accomplish something (the usefulness in benchmarking best practices should be immediately obvious). This modelling process actually means finding and describing the important elements and processes that people go through, beginning with finding and studying a human model. This is a person, who does something in a particular, usually highly skilful, way. For example, if you want to know how to teach some particular skill or concept, you'd first find someone who does it extremely well. Then ask him or her lots of questions about what they do, why they do it, what works and doesn't work, and so on. At the same time, observing this person in action will often lead to new and better questions to ask in the process. Most of us do this already, though perhaps not systematically. The addition of specific NLP technology makes it possible to discover much of what this human model does that he or she is not aware of. To do this well means to actually study the structure of people's thought processes and internal experience, as well as their observable behaviour.

During their early studies Handler and Grinder developed a unique system of asking questions and gathering information that was based on the fields of transformational grammar and general semantics. Later they and their colleagues discovered certain minimal cues people give that indicate very specific kinds of thought processes. These include eye movements, certain gestures, breathing patterns, voice tone changes, and even very subtle cues such as pupil dilation and skin colour changes (training of Practitioners of NLP Includes the skills and knowledge to use these information gathering techniques and to notice and interpret the subtle cues).

NLP is this gathering of information to make models, based on the internal experience and information processing of the people being studied and modelled, including the part that is outside of their conscious awareness. The word neuro refers to an understanding of the brain and its functioning. Linguistic relates to the communication aspects (both verbal and non-verbal) of our information processing. Programming is the behavioural and

thinking patterns we all go through. There is a relationship between perceptions, thinking, and behaviour that is neuro-linguistic in nature. The relationship is operating all the time, no matter what we are doing, and it can be studied by exploring our internal or subjective experience. The formal definition of neuro-linguistic programming is: The study of the structure of subjective experience.

I was already a certified NLP practitioner so it was relatively easy for me to dovetail aspects of psychological manipulation into the general tradecraft I was teaching and already practising as an agent handler and covert operative. Over the next couple of years and in great secrecy, I developed, prepared, and presented several different training programmes to the South African Special Forces through Executive Outcomes and called my partner in whenever I required his assistance.

I also developed a training programme for Special Forces' counter-espionage division. Colonel Prinsloo additionally tasked Executive Outcomes to procure specialist equipment for covert operations by Special Forces.

This was an exciting although difficult time of my life as I had to run one of Brian Mellor's companies, work alongside GIT, train Special Forces operatives, and still conduct operations for the CCB—all without any of the parties knowing about my involvement with the others. I had by then reactivated some of my old DCC agents and put them back to work, but I was essentially working in the dark, so I tasked them to gather whatever information they could and pass it on to me using a series of clandestine communications channels being run through London.

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Soon after that, Brian sent me to the UK to meet a group of defence manufacturers who were developing a new explosive compound that potentially had military applications. Armscor had approached us because Mellor Imports had successfully concluded the earlier Dartcord acquisition. I immediately arranged to meet with Nico to determine how the military intended to use the new explosive compound. His answer would determine how I would approach the manufacturer when I ordered and purchased the product for shipping to South Africa.

Nico had a sincere belief in his country and in himself, and gave his very best at everything he turned his hand to, yet, he was becoming increasingly disillusioned about the way things were going in the country and frequently questioned what was really happening. Like me, he felt that the government's policies were designed to create discord, rather than peace, amongst the country's citizens. I couldn't reciprocate by expressing my own disquiet because I still considered myself a soldier through my covert association with the CCB and Special Forces.

I again turned to Roger Kent in the UK to make my hotel bookings. Brian and I had agreed to use him to help us smuggle the explosive back to South Africa (if the manufacturer was willing to take the risk as they had with the Dartcord transaction). My

visit would be an ideal opportunity to generate business for Mellor Imports and Armscor. At the same time it would provide me with a secure cover to meet and task my old agents.

Brian also asked me to contact the Romanian state arms manufacturer, Romtechnica. He thought they might be able to give us access to certain Eastern Bloc weapons if Armscor ever approached us in this regard. I traced their Cyprus office through Nico and set up a meeting with their representative, 'John Rankin', an Englishman living in Nicosia.

Before departing for the UK I arranged to meet my old agents, re-examined my cover story, and checked and sanitised all my clothing and luggage of anything that might compromise me. Then it was time to go.

I arrived at London's Heathrow Airport early on a May morning in 1989 and got through Her Majesty's Immigration and Customs without a problem. Roger was waiting for me in the arrivals hall of Terminal Four. Over a paper cup of dreadful- tasting English coffee, he gave me the run-down on his own newly established company and we discussed how he could assist me if I identified products useful to the South African Army. Due to the UN arms embargo against South Africa, the shipping of such products was usually complex. We would need to generate orders from UN-acceptable countries, provide valid end-user certificates, bribe officials to alter shipping documents, and arrange transshipments where necessary.

Roger had booked me into a small country hotel in the Cobham area which was ideally suited for what I really had in mind. After dropping me off at the hotel, he left for London, promising to pick me up at 08:00 the next morning for our scheduled meeting with the explosives manufacturer. No sooner had he gone—leaving me to 'rest before our meetings tomorrow'—I also left the hotel, found a payphone, called my old agents, and confirmed our meetings.

I knew from my days in DCC that in South Africa, the SAP's Security Branch routinely tapped phones at certain hotels in an attempt to identify subversive patterns. I had no idea if the same kind of security methodology was practised in England but I decided not to take the risk. I also considered the possibility that Roger had informed the British authorities of my visit to clear his position should any negative blowback develop regarding his assistance to my company. Whichever way, outside payphones had to be more secure than hotel phones.

I started with 'Ron Griffiths', an Englishman who had served with me in 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing and soldiered in wars across the length and breadth of the world. Despite his seeming slowness of mind and speech, he was actually very switched-on and fully understood the risks of the war we were involved in. I had recruited him several months before and run him as a chief agent when I was with DCC's Section Terrorism.

The agents Ron controlled had mostly been talent-spotted by him but recruited by me to ensure a clean cut-off and avoid compromising him. After I recruited them, he took over running them using various indirect communications channels or cut- outs.[97] Now that the agents had been awakened from their 'sleep', it was time for me to meet them in person and redirect their efforts.

After speaking to Ron, I changed into a fresh suit and took the next train to London. A few hours later I met him at the Cumberland Hotel in Oxford Street. I had occasionally used this hotel as a meeting point for agents in the past. Its location and its many entrances and exits made it ideal for excellent counter-surveillance measures.

"Good to see you again, Ron," I said as we shook hands. Ron's weather-beaten face creased into a smile.

"Likewise, Echo Bravo. What brings you back to London? Something exciting I hope?"

He was dressed like the proverbial English country gentleman in Harris tweeds and a matching flatcap.

Sitting in the lobby of the Cumberland Hotel, we probably looked like two successful businessmen discussing an important transaction. In a manner of speaking, we were doing exactly that, except that our business was distinctly more sinister than buying and selling groceries. After a few minutes of small talk we got down to the real reason for my visit.

"Ron, are all our old DLBs [dead letter boxes] still okay? I know they've been dormant for some time, but I want to use them to locate the old team and pass on meeting instructions."

"Of course, Boss. I still have the old gang's contact numbers and schedules. When you woke us up, I immediately made the necessary contacts and put them back to work. On the way here I also checked out some of the old drops and they are still securely in place. Do you want me to let them know you're here?"

"Don't worry about that, Ron, they already know."

It was typical of Ron. He didn't even bother to ask who I was working for this time around. He just accepted that there was work to be done and he wanted to be part of it.

I outlined my immediate priorities which were to schedule and confirm meetings with our old agents as I needed to re-task them. I would need two hours per agent, starting in two days' time. That would give me time to see the new explosive product and discuss the purchase with the manufacturer to confirm my business cover. The instructions for the meetings would be relayed to the agents via their DLBs after Ron had called them by telephone.

Author in Zurich, Switzerland after debriefing an agent. CCB operation, 1989

We were to run a test on the communications systems we had used in the past and determine how to streamline them.

I wanted confirmation of all the African National Congress, Pan-Africanist Congress, South African Communist Party, Irish Republican Army, and Palestinian Liberation Organisation's haunts. Ron was to gather whatever addresses he could. In turn I would determine which of them were actively supporting South Africa's enemies.

I needed members or sympathisers of the End Conscription Campaign in London identified, photographed, and monitored to determine cross-pollination between them, the ANC, and the PAC.

I needed to know which embassies in London were giving aid and support to the above enemy organisations (there were several) and to identify the people involved.[98] I needed a 'clean' and untraceable pistol, preferably a .22 calibre, which would be easy to silence if the need to use it arose. To secure this I suggested that Ron turn to the criminal underworld as the most likely source.

I also needed a new identity and a British passport so that I could establish myself as a UK resident.

We needed to set up a legitimate trading company from which to conduct profitable business as money was needed to fund our operations.

Finally I instructed Ron to set up a surveillance team of reliable and discreet people for operational purposes. I wanted him to give them the impression that the team was working for the British Army or the Special Branch in some way or other. Under no circumstances were they to be told that they were actually working for South Africa.

Ron assured me that everything would be taken care of. Most of the men he knew were only too keen to get back to doing the work they had been trained for. They also understood undercover work, so that posed no problem. He said a couple of the men he knew were just perfect for the job. They too felt that Britain was confusing its friends with its enemies and disapproved of the shoddy treatment being meted out to South Africa.

"Okay, Ron, I've got to go," I told him. "Can we meet at Piccadilly Circus tomorrow at 19:00? Hang around the entrance to the tube station by that shoe shop—Shelly's I think it's called—you'll spot me coming. Just slot in behind me and I'll take you somewhere quiet for a meal and a status report. Oh, I suppose we'd better start implementing some counter-surveillance measures, so watch your back when we leave the hotel."

"I'm so looking forward to this. It's going to be like old times," Ron said with a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, the only difference is we won't be risking our lives like we did in the Angolan bush. Instead, if things go wrong, we'll probably end up dying of old age in Dartmoor Prison."

Using our planned modus operandi, Ron left first, walked to Bayswater Road, and slipped into Hyde Park. This gave me time to see if he was being shadowed by anyone. I then doubled back to the hotel, dived down into the Marble Arch underground entrance, and caught a tube to Russell Square, a cab to the station, and the next train back to Cobham.

The next day I accompanied Roger to the manufacturer's premises where the new explosive compound was to be demonstrated. With Roger acting as my UK representative, we discussed how we could transship the explosives to South Africa and spoke about letters of credit, end-user certificates, shipping documents that would be needed if Armscor went ahead with the order, and the possibilities and implications of discovery.

Over the next four days, apart from visiting various other product suppliers with Roger, I re-established personal contact with my agents, developed their new collection plans, confirmed their reporting channels to Ron through a series of dead letter boxes, and generally tried to convince them that they were doing a good job. I also stressed the need to take no executive action unless I authorised it. Some of them voiced disappointment at this.

I left London a week later, satisfied that my network of coverts would allow me to achieve whatever orders and taskings the CCB gave me. I also planned to set up a parallel agent network in case the existing network was compromised. That would ensure an uninterrupted flow of information from the UK.

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Next I had to meet John Rankin in Nicosia, Cyprus. I landed at Larnaca Airport on 23 May 1989. John was waiting for me and drove me to the Hilton Hotel in Nicosia. He and I hit it off right from the start. He was keen to do business with the devil if need be—and so was I. We spent a few days discussing Romanian military products and how to get them to South Africa. John confided that he was ex-SAS and still maintained contacts in his old

regiment. He was possibly trying to bait me into divulging information about myself, but if he was, I disappointed him. To establish his bona fides, he pointed through his apartment window at two men having tea at a sidewalk café.

"See those guys there? They are GRU [Soviet Military Intelligence] operators working from the Soviet Embassy. They take their tea there every afternoon at 14:00."

"I think I'll go and join them tomorrow," I said, thinking it would be good for a laugh. "Who in South Africa would ever believe I had taken tea with some Soviet military operatives?"

John wasn't sure whether or not I was joking, but he looked visibly shaken. I did it anyway.

I approached the GRU men promptly at 14:00 the next day and introduced myself as a South African businessman. Once they got over their initial surprise, we spent a memorable hour trading stories and discussing the world and its politics. Both men had spent time in Africa and we were amazed at how similar our views on the world were, and how we all believed we were being used by our political masters. I'm sure they concluded I was something more than a businessman but they didn't spoil our discussion by mentioning it. By the time we went our separate ways we all knew we had taken an unusual opportunity to meet 'the enemy'.

After three days in Nicosia I flew home to South Africa feeling that I had achieved a great deal both for Mellor Imports and the CCB. John was keen to do business with Mellor Imports, and over the next few months we built up a good business relationship and became firm friends. Brian was happy with the way I was running the business, notwithstanding that I didn't spend much time at the company. With the added responsibility of presenting training courses to Special Forces, my life had become rather crowded.

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During the coming months I frequently travelled to the UK, Ireland, Portugal, France, Cyprus, Lebanon, and several other destinations—depending on what my agents had ferreted out or thought important, or where Brian wanted me to go. I felt like a mushroom as far as the CCB was concerned—they kept me in the dark and fed me shit. The constant travelling was exhausting. I needed to figure out a more practical way of doing my job.

I eventually recruited four ex-SADF sappers whom I had commanded during the war in Angola and tasked them to assist me in building up networks, running agents, and providing offensive support when required, and with their help, I conducted several covert operations across Europe. The CCB refused to provide funding for these men, so I decided to pay them directly from my own sources of income as a temporary measure. Both Colonel Verster and Mike, however, assured me that any such personal outlay would be refunded to me at a later date. I had no reason to disbelieve them.

I became so busy presenting courses to Special Forces' covert operatives that time became my greatest enemy. I was eventually forced to tell Brian that I had been asked to

assist the army with something and needed to be absent for three weeks. Brian agreed to let me present courses during the day and continue my work for Mellor Imports at night.

During one of my breaks between lectures, Colonel Prinsloo asked to see me. He told me he was pleased with the way the programmes were going and that feedback from the men had been exceptionally positive. It was obvious that he was edging towards something.

"How keen would you be to help Special Forces on a more…" he started hesitantly, "let's call it a more covert level? We have an organisation that can use men with your expertise."

I immediately knew he was referring to the CCB. He didn't know that I already belonged to it.

"Thanks for the offer, Colonel," I said, feigning gratitude and surprise, "I must say that I never expected an offer like this. I wasn't even aware there was another side to Special Forces. Do you mind if I think about it? You've caught me off guard." "There's a lot about us that you don't know," he said with his deep rumbling laugh and his eyes twinkling. "I cannot say any more until I know your answer." "I accept that, sir, and thank you for your confidence in me."

I left his office, once again grateful that one hand didn't always know what the other was doing.

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Back at Mellor Imports, Brian was planning a new business trip to London for me. Roger had let us know that he was interested in purchasing a body armour company. There was no such manufacturer in South Africa at the time and Brian immediately saw it as an exploitable business opportunity. He also arranged for me to attend the Covert Operational Procurement Exhibition (COPEX) at Sandown Park in November. I could combine these into one trip during which I would be able to meet my agents as well as seeing what new weaponry was available in the world and what options such weapons held for future CCB operations.

GIT had in the meantime been functioning smoothly without me. Bingo Kruger and Witte van Heerden occasionally briefed me and grudgingly paid me whatever dues were mine. As I was mostly absent from the company, I felt they secretly resented paying me at all—maybe justifiably so. But I needed the money to keep my region running smoothly.

Before leaving for the UK I phoned Mike to see if he had any special orders or tasks for me. He asked me to come and see him as he had something important to discuss.

He told me that there were rumours circulating about the CCB having been compromised and suggested I take extra precautionary measures to ensure the security of my cover and my own safety. I had spent so much time out of the country that I hadn't been following the local news. I asked him to explain.

"Region 6 has fallen foul of the law," he told me. "It seems the guys there have been causing a lot of shit," he said vaguely. "Just be careful."

I wasn't bothered as I was satisfied that my covers and those of my men were secure. I was also confident that it wouldn't be easy for anyone to point fingers at me for misappropriation of funds because the CCB hadn't given me any. My agents—or as the CCB preferred to call them, my coverts—were happily burrowing ever deeper into the fabric of everyday life. I knew that our operations were secure and that my cover with Mellor Imports was credible, and that it could be checked and authenticated at any time. My false travel documents also didn't concern me as they were good enough to stand careful scrutiny. I was certain that I had nothing to be worried about.

I changed the subject.

"Mike, my region has gathered tons of intelligence on the ANC and its surrogates. We have also conducted several covert operations on opportunity targets. I've been asking for clear direction for some time and I get no answers. What the hell am I supposed to be doing?"

"Don't worry," said Mike cheerfully, "Joe (Verster) knows you're busy and he's happy with what you've been doing. Just keep it up."

Feeling slight concern about what Mike had said about Region 6, I left his offices and travelled back to Pretoria to consider my options.

I asked Roger Kent to arrange an invitation for the upcoming COPEX and to again book hotel accommodation for me. He offered to print business cards that identified me as his company's 'Director, Africa Operations', which would validate my reason for attending, and I gladly agreed.

We were able to identify a few minor items likely to be of interest to Special Forces at COPEX and I passed this information back to Brian. But I had other more pressing and urgent business to take care of. I had to make the time to see my agents and keep them up to speed. However, I must have been sounding a bit like a stuck record; all I seemed to be doing was asking for intelligence and tasking them to 'continue with monitoring and gathering actions'. Our operations aimed at disruption of the enemy were certainly not spectacular.

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By early December 1989 Mellor Imports had established contact with a Portuguese company that was marketing a brick-making machine and building system patented in Brazil. Brian decided I should travel to Portugal and investigate the system's potential for the South African market, where there was a pressing need for affordable housing.

"South Africa will need to build affordable housing for all peoples of this country. Things cannot continue the way they have been," Brian commented.

I agreed, and told him that if I was a young black youth living in a tin shack with no prospects, I would probably choose the same militant route that so many of them had.

I flew to Lisbon to meet 'Jose Pereira', the Portuguese company's representative. Jose had established a close liaison with the PLO's ambassador to Portugal, Dr Beshisho, as he was trying to sell the system to the Palestinians. Aware of the tensions between South Africa and the Palestinians—the latter being regarded as terrorists by the South African

and other governments—Jose introduced me to Dr Beshisho as 'a longstanding friend from Zambia'. This wasn't at all true, as I had only known Jose for a day or two, but he had warned me in advance that he would handle things in this manner. He didn't want any antagonism to develop during the several hours drive we would have to take to an area north of Mangualde where the system was in use.

Dr Beshisho was very interested to learn my views on the ever-worsening situation in southern Africa and specifically in South Africa. He was also particularly interested in the state of religion, especially the growth and acceptance of Islam. Giving my opinion as someone who was apparently only a casual observer of events, I am sure my views didn't disappoint him—more so when I said I was opposed to South Africa's continued cooperation with Israel. In the next few days our friendship developed and he invited me as a guest of honour to the first anniversary celebrations of the PLO having gained observer status at the UN. At this function in Lisbon, I was entertained by many of our so-called enemies and introduced to a good cross-section of the who's who of international terrorism, none of whom had any idea who I really was or what I was doing.

Using the cover, 'Jose's friend from Zambia', Dr Beshisho introduced me to a senior commander of Black September's Western European operations, who I shall refer to as Mr X. Mr X and I immediately got along despite our differing cultures and values. He spoke to me about their many problems and I was a sympathetic listener, keen to condemn his enemies and give him good advice. I quickly became Mr X's shoulder to cry on. All information gained was encoded, encrypted, and sent to South Africa for further dissemination. We subsequently maintained regular contact and he gave me a lot of valuable information that helped me to understand Black September's operations in Europe and the Middle East. The silence from the CCB, however, was deafening. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable with my situation as I was not at all sure what I was really supposed to be doing. I felt like a cork bobbing around on the ocean.

The author (right) while in command of CCB's Region 5 with commander (Black September) left and PLO's ambassador to Portugal – 1989

While still in Portugal I received an urgent message from 'Bill', one of the four ex-SADF sappers I had recruited. A sub-agent of his had reported that an arms shipment destined for the UK was due to leave a PLO facility somewhere in West Beirut, Lebanon. Under pressure to follow up this information, I agreed to meet Bill in Paris the next morning and we flew into Beirut to meet his contact. If I could verify the information, I thought I might be able to arrange some sort of intelligence trade-off with Britain's MI6. The irony was that only a day or two before, I had been the guest of honour at a PLO function.

Travelling on French passports, we landed at Beirut International Airport and cleared customs and immigration without a problem. Although the fighting in Beirut had officially ended in September after the warring parties had adopted the Arab League's ceasefire plan, it was still a dangerous area. Waiting for us in a run-down Mercedes Benz, Bill's contact, 'Wassim', met us and hurriedly transported us to a safe house. My first thought was that the term 'safe house' was a misnomer. Having obviously seen much of the civil war, the entire area appeared to be devastated and much of it was still smouldering. We remained indoors for the rest of the day because Wassim was afraid that reprisals would be exacted against him and his family if they were seen by the 'wrong people'. To make life even more difficult, the Israelis, Syrians, Hezbollah, and several other ominous organisations and groups were still trading bullets with each other.

Later that evening, armed with AK-47s and dressed in jeans, black sweatshirts, and All Star canvas boots, we left to investigate the reported arms cache, also in West Beirut. Wassim first took us to another safe house to meet two of his friends who would accompany us. En route we came under fire from either the Syrian Army or Hezbollah or both. Whoever it was seemed intent on enforcing some sort of curfew. The three of us immediately returned fire and our tracers criss-crossed with those of the unidentified gunmen until finally their guns fell silent.

We met Wassim's friends at the safe house and replenished ammunition. Wassim was a Maronite Christian, but the friends who would lead us to the cache were Sunni Muslims. Both of them were concerned that Bill and I might find ourselves the targets of a kidnap if we were caught in the area—a fate many Westerners had already suffered in Beirut. If we were confronted, our only solution would be to fight our way out and try to escape back to Wassim's house.

The five of us cautiously made our way to the area where the arms cache was supposed to be, silently negotiating our way through the deserted streets and alleys. When we got there, we were disappointed to find that the cache had already been moved.

During our exfiltration, we again came under fire and again had to fight our way out of the area. One of Wassim's friends left us to return home, and Wassim and his remaining friend took us to people who kept us hidden for several hours. I couldn't help but marvel at the Lebanese people, Christian and Muslim alike, who risked so much to take such great care of us. Despite struggling under changing 'occupations', they were prepared to share what little they had with us.

A day later Bill and I left Beirut. I first flew to Paris and from there back to Johannesburg. Brian never suspected I had been engaged in any extra-mural activities and was satisfied with the work I was doing for his company.

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In mid-January 1990 Mike told me that stories about the CCB's Region 6 were becoming nastier and the risk of us all being compromised was escalating. Region 6, according to Mike, had now become a major thorn in the side of the CCB and Special Forces. He was confident, though, that Joe Verster would succeed in resolving the problems and that it wouldn't have much effect on us, except to make public that the organisation existed.

"What are these stories?" I asked him.

"It seems the guys in Region 6 have been caught with their fingers in the till.[99] I also heard that the police are investigating them for certain criminal actions but you know how rumours work."

"Well at least I've got nothing to worry about… I haven't even been given a till. I only hope that all the money I've spent so far will be paid back to me."

"Don't worry, if Joe says he'll refund the money, he will. On the business side, you've got to contact a guy called Johan. He has a message for you."

"Who the hell is Johan?" I asked. I'd never heard of him but the CCB was so damn secretive, what else could I have expected?

"How should I know?" said Mike, "I'm only the messenger, but I suspect he's one of us."

I phoned Johan as soon as I left Mike's office. After exchanging pleasantries we arranged to meet at the rotunda in the upmarket Sandton Towers Hotel an hour later. We spoke together like old friends, even though I didn't know him from a bar

of soap. Neither of us said who we were but I assumed Mike was correct about him being in the CCB.

"We've got a job for you," Johan told me over coffee. "There's a guy in London— an ANC guy—he's got to be taken care of."

"Should I translate that to mean 'taken out' or 'befriended?'" I asked.

"Let's just say that once you are through with him, we never want to hear his name again."

Johan told me the man posed a threat to South Africa's national security. Although my region (read me, my four unofficial CCB members, and a sprinkling of agents) was ready to carry out whatever it was called on to do—assassinations, breaking and entering offices and facilities, or recruiting agents—it was the first time I had been directly ordered to kill someone via the CCB's hierarchy.

"If he poses such a threat, wouldn't it be better to snatch and interrogate him?" I asked. "He ought to have a whole archive of intelligence in his head and making him talk should be simple."

"I have no idea why you shouldn't interrogate him but you know the rules. Just obey the fucking order," Johan responded abruptly.

Despite his seeming nonchalance, I could sense that he was worried about something, but he didn't enlighten me about his concerns. Perhaps I was the first person he had tasked to carry out a sanctioned killing. I would never know.

"Well, I reckon these so-called orders are short-sighted. Anyone who poses a threat to national security must possess a lot of valuable intelligence," I said. "But as you say—orders are orders—I'll see what we can do."

"The boss thought you might baulk at this," said Johan getting agitated, "Once you have carried out the order, take the next flight back here and contact me as soon as you land. It is vital that I debrief you without delay. And don't discuss this with anyone but me."

"Listen Johan, I have never baulked at carrying out an order," I said. "I'll do what needs to be done but there are limits so fuck you and your opinion. I'll let you know when the job is done. Oh, and by the way, I never discuss my orders with anyone."

I was furious with Johan for having questioned my proficiency and my loyalty and we didn't part on friendly terms. A few days later I was back on a London-bound aircraft. I had told Brian that I wanted to visit Matra Marconi Space at Borehamwood to discuss a special airborne surveillance system for use in countering cross-border smuggling. Although most African governments vociferously condemned South Africa, their citizens were desperately trying to move there to create better futures for themselves as their own countries moved increasingly closer to collapse and failure. A lot of cross-border human

trafficking was taking place, to say nothing of weapons smuggling and drug trafficking. Brian had told me some time before that the diamond giant De Beers was also on the lookout for an aerial surveillance system that could be utilised to counter their escalating problems with illicit diamond trafficking.

A couple of years previously I had gained access to an ANC facility in London through a young South African schoolboy. 'Peter' had come to my attention when a friend spoke of a rebellious youngster who had voiced his anger about the Nationalist Party's conscription laws. I had made contact with Peter in 1987 and eventually recruited him. He had been given training in intelligence matters during a school holiday and evaded his obligatory National Service by 'fleeing' to Botswana after completing his schooling. Once there, he had reported to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They had provided him with travel documents which allowed him to move to an ANC facility in Zambia. A few months later he had made it to London and I had told him to 'go to sleep' and remember that one day I would activate him.

Before leaving, I had tasked Ron to find me an untraceable weapon. I had also tasked Peter to begin surveillance and compile a dossier on the intended target. I didn't want to waste any time once I was in London.

My plan was uncomplicated. I intended to shoot the target in a densely crowded area like the London Underground.[100] The noise on a very busy station platform at rush hour would mask the slight blast of a silenced small-calibre pistol if there was a train moving in or out. I would have the weapon in a shoulder bag which would allow me to place the barrel against the target and fire two quick shots through the bag. The ejected cartridge cases would be caught in the bag, leaving no evidence of my involvement and obviating the need for a 'sweeper'. People would see the target collapse but would think he had fainted or had a heart attack. I would quietly move away and blend into the crowd. Then I would meet Ron at a prearranged street corner and hand him the pistol for disposal before flying out.

John Jones of Matra Marconi met me at the airport on a typical grey English morning and drove me to a hotel. To him I was just another foreigner trying to do business with Marconi, and he was happy to facilitate any customer that had the money to pay for their products.

That night, I met with 'Peter'. Since being placed in the ANC a few years before he had built up his legend and could effectively use it to gain discreet access into areas and organisations that we had targeted for our operations. I asked him to give me a comprehensive briefing on the target and his activities. Peter knew the target personally and believed that he posed absolutely no threat to South Africa. He wasn't even an active member of the London-based ANC or the End-Conscription Campaign.

"I think you have the wrong guy," he said.

From Peter's notes I learnt that the target was only 22 years old, a diligent student who was well liked by his neighbours, and had never openly expressed any anti-South African sentiments. He had attended a few ANC meetings, but other than that he kept a low profile

and was more interested in his education than he was in exporting terrorism to his home country.

This concerned me. If we started killing everyone who had attended ANC meetings, we would probably end up shooting dozens of innocent people all over London. I communicated my concerns back to Johan in South Africa who told me just to go ahead and do the deed as ordered. I didn't like it…something seemed wrong. I had no qualms about killing an enemy, but I had a problem with shooting someone simply because he didn't agree with what the South African government wanted him to believe. I didn't even agree with our government. Did that mean I would have to shoot myself too, I wondered?

To play for time, I told Peter that we would monitor the target for a few days, just to be certain. I felt I needed to get inside his mind and find out what he was up to. Only then would I make a final decision whether to kill him or let him live. We placed him under intense surveillance thinking that he might also lead us to a more important target.

I met Ron that evening and he handed me an unmarked .22 silenced pistol and twenty rounds of ammunition in a plastic bag. We were having a grilled steak in the downstairs seating area of an Angus steakhouse.

"If you want, I can get you an untraceable silenced Ingram MAC 10[101] instead," Ron offered.

"No thanks, Ron, I don't need to take out a couple of bystanders too. That wouldn't go down at all well with the police here."

I didn't ask him where he had obtained the pistol and I doubted he would have told me anyway. The important point was that he had delivered what was needed. I also knew that I could rely on him to help me find a place in which to lie low if the hit went wrong.

"Is it clean?" I asked.

"Clean as a whistle, Boss. It's brand spanking new. Return it to me later and I'll dispose of it."

"Okay, I'll tell you where we should meet and I'll pass it to you by means of a brush contact. I'll have it in a shopping bag."

"Who's the target and when will you be bumping him off?" he blurted out, suddenly unable to contain himself, but before I could answer, he said, "Sorry Boss, I know that was stupid. It's just…this is like the old days. Waging war right here in central London… it's exciting."

I spent the next few mornings building and solidifying my cover by discussing the airborne surveillance system with John. I spent the afternoons and evenings watching the target with Peter. We shadowed him all over London hoping he might lead us to a bigger target, but everything he did seemed irreproachable. In the end I had to agree with Peter. It certainly didn't look as though he posed a threat to South Africa's national security.

I decided to abort the hit. I knew that whoever had passed the order down the food chain was going to end up being distinctly unhappy with me. I shrugged inwardly...that would be his problem, not mine. If some politician wanted the target killed, he could fly to London and do it himself. Peter was visibly relieved when I told him this.

I contacted Ron via our emergency channel the next morning and asked for an urgent meeting. We met in an old church off Oxford Street where I handed him the pistol and told him it hadn't been used.

"Did something go wrong?" he asked.

"No, just save the gun for another day, Ron," I said as we parted, "You never know when we might need it again."

On a cold English evening in about mid-February, I flew back to South Africa to tell Johan face-to-face that I hadn't carried out the hit and that I had no intention of murdering someone just because he had fled to the UK. I had little doubt that my blatant disregard for orders would not be well received by the CCB.

Unbeknown to me, the CCB's pot had been boiling in South Africa and was close to exploding. Working in Europe and the Middle East, I had not really paid much attention to what was happening at home despite the concerns Mike had occasionally expressed. I knew that my region was uncompromised so I had never really worried about Mike's anxieties. But when the media finally opened the CCB's cupboard, I was both shocked and worried. The implications were horrendous.

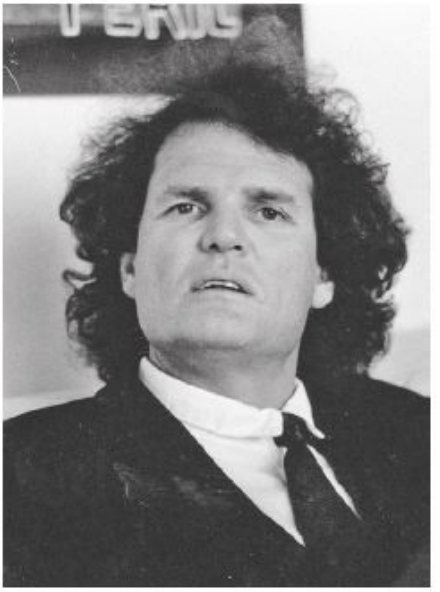
Dr David Webster, an academic at the University of the Witwatersrand, had been assassinated on 1 May 1989. Although there had been much speculation about his murder, it appeared that he had been obsessed with exposing the SADF's covert assistance to the Mozambique resistance movement, RENAMO, as well as their link to the Inkatha Freedom Party led by Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Mike suspected that Webster had been the victim of a CCB hit.

On 31 October that year Ferdi Barnard had been arrested and placed in Section 29 detention in connection with the assassination. This clause of the Internal Security Act allowed the police to detain people 'for interrogation purposes'. Section 29 detainees were held incommunicado in solitary confinement, without access to lawyers, family, friends, or anyone else apart from their interrogators for unlimited periods. This was commonly referred to as 'detention without trial' and the human rights violation was frequently criticised in the international arena.[102]

A finger had also been pointed at Calla Botha who was a friend of Ferdi Barnard's.

Botha had voiced concern to Staal Burger (the commander of Region 6) who had placated him by telling him any investigation would be halted at the highest level.

On 24 November, Barnard's father (an ex-SAP colonel) submitted an urgent application to the Supreme Court calling for his son to be released from detention. This was opposed by the Minister of Law and Order, the Commissioner of Police, and the SAP's Divisional Commander of the Witwatersrand division. An opposing affidavit filed by another senior SAP officer had hinted at the existence of a 'secret group'. Later, this group was also connected to the killing of the Windhoek-based, pro-SWAPO, advocate Anton Lubowski[103] on 12 September 1989. The group had been fingered as being part of the SADF. The first cracks that would blow the CCB wide open had begun to show.



Anton Lubowski's assassination was attributed to the CCB's Region 6 (photo: SAHA)

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Johan sounded surprised when I called him from Jan Smuts International Airport (now OR Tambo) and immediately agreed to meet me at Sandton City, a large shopping and business complex.

"How did it go?" he asked.

"Before I get to that, what's the latest with this stuff on CCB? There are some lousy stories doing the rounds and Mike told me that all is not well some time ago." "You can check that with Mike and not me. Now how did it go?" he asked, agitated

by my wilful lack of response. "It didn't go."

Johan's next words churned my insides.

"The boss will be pissed off with you for failing to carry out your orders," he said, "But it doesn't matter. You've been shut down."

"Shut down? What do you mean? Are you talking about the CCB or just Region 5?" "The CCB as a whole. Mike will tell you about it."

"Well, thanks for forgetting to let me know," I said sarcastically. "What about the guy I was supposed to have killed? Under the circumstances that would have been murder."

"You disobeyed a direct order," Johan retorted.

"I didn't shoot him because he posed no threat," I said.

"The boss warned us that you were bloody bolshy. Anyway, I had no way of contacting you."

"Well, fuck the boss and the rest of you. If he doesn't like what I did, tell him to fire me unless I've already lost my job by grace of the shut-down," I responded, and stormed off to see Mike. Brian and Mellor Imports would have to wait until I had sorted out the mess I was in. I met Mike at his office an hour later.

"Mike, what the hell is going on? This character Johan has just told me that we've been shut down."

"I'm afraid he's right. I can only tell you what I know, which isn't much."

Despite his previous reassurances, the truth was that members of Region 6 had seriously compromised the whole CCB. This had led to a high-level investigation into its activities, as well as the front companies being used to provide cover; Joe Verster had also been arrested and was being held in Section 29 detention.

"Are you shitting me, Mike?" I asked.

"No, this is serious. We are done for, closed, dead, non-existent," he replied. "Maybe you had better come and see me again tomorrow. I'll see what else I can find out while you get your head around this."

To say that I was shocked would be an understatement. How could we possibly have been shut down? Who was behind this betrayal? Where were our generals and why weren't they standing up and fighting for us?

My greatest concern suddenly became Brian Mellor and his companies. If the CCB was being investigated and the regions and their activities were exposed, that could destroy his businesses totally. Brian had unwittingly helped me and I was about to unwittingly compromise him and his business. I needed to prevent that at all costs. I phoned him and told him that I was back from the UK and needed to speak to him very urgently the next morning.

I had suddenly become alarmed by the possibility that the investigators could already be on to me. I asked Brian if we could take a walk. I wanted him out of the building in case his offices had already been bugged. I also wanted him away from his comfort zone where it would be easier for me to impart my devastating news.

"Brian, I need to confess that I may have severely compromised you. By now, you've probably heard all about the investigation into the Civil Cooperation Bureau? What you don't know is that I am a member of the organisation. I have been ever since I started working for you."

"Oh, shit ... how is this going to affect me?" asked Brian. I didn't know.

"I'll do everything in my power to keep you out of it and see that it doesn't become known that I used your companies as a cover for operations," I said. "You have my word."

"How did you get away with it right under my nose? Did you involve my companies in any way? What's going to happen now?"

A visibly shocked and angry Brian needed answers fast.

I assured him that I had never had any intention of compromising him, his companies, or his business interests. Nor had I ever misused his company finances. To ensure that my

CCB connection didn't blot his good name, I would resign with immediate effect and break all ties. He would never have to see me again.

Brian agreed that this would be the best way to end our relationship. He had always been good to me, helped me where he could, and showed complete confidence in me. All I could do was try to ensure that my involvement with the CCB, if it ever became known, would not tarnish his good name. I owed him that much at the very least.

I cleared my desk, thanked Brian for the opportunities he had given me and the trust he had placed in me, apologised for putting him in an invidious position, and said an embarrassing goodbye. He shook my hand and wished me luck. I never saw him again.

I left Mellor Imports with a lot of sadness and guilt, but life would go on and I had to find something to do quickly. Not only had I been fired from one job (I still needed to speak to Mike to learn exactly where I stood with the CCB) I had also just resigned from another, all within the space of two days.

I still had Executive Outcomes, an unblemished company which I could continue to use as a vehicle for Special Forces training, but the contract was only a verbal agreement between myself and Colonel Prinsloo so I certainly couldn't speak to him about what had happened. I would just have to play it cool and act as though I didn't have a care in the world. It was hardly a way to make a living, though, because the training programmes were only done on an ad hoc basis and didn't bring in a steady income.

There was also my membership of Geo International Trading, but I had no idea what they were up to. I later discovered that all was not well there either.

My next problem was my four 'expatriate agents' still stuck in Europe, blissfully unaware of what was happening. The networks could be shut down easily, but how would I get my men back to South Africa? I decided to bring it up with Mike when we met later in the day. I was certain that the CCB would do something to help me.

"Mike, this is a monumental cock-up," I told him. "I have just resigned from the company that was unwittingly providing me with cover. I have had to sacrifice a bloody good job and now I have nothing. What is happening? I'm really pissed off that no one had the decency to tell me we were being closed down. I've been running around my region like a headless chicken apparently working for no one."

"I am sorry, but it wasn't my fault. All I can tell you is that you must cease all operations immediately and withdraw anyone who is still outside the country. Under no circumstances can you continue until we get a clearer picture of what's happening."

"I need money to get four guys back to South Africa. Can you arrange that?" "No," Mike responded, "I'm sorry. I've been cut off from funds and I can't find money for any damn thing. I'm afraid you'll just have to sort them out on your own." Mike then told me that neither the Minister of Defence (General Magnus Malan) nor any of the generals had uttered a single word in defence of the CCB or tried to prevent its closure. They were following the CYA (cover-your-arse) principle, claiming that they had no knowledge of the organisation whatsoever. It was obvious they didn't want to risk their chances of getting golden handshakes and being able to retire in luxury. The myth that the SADF had generals who would stand by their men through thick and thin had finally been exposed as

nothing but cheap propaganda. It appeared to me that many of them were simply cowards, protecting their political interests.

That was it; we were simply being kicked out of the back door and left to rot. I was furious. Even worse, I was virtually broke and still had four men stuck in Europe waiting for me—waiting for orders, waiting for money, waiting to come back home. Then there were the agents who had also risked their lives for me, my organisation, and South Africa. What would happen to them?

I had a sinking feeling that the CCB were also going to renege on Verster's promise about refunding the expenditure I had incurred. This meant I would probably have to carry my own financial losses. My feeling proved to be right.

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By then, my networks stretched from Europe to Asia. My cover was also well developed and made provision for:

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Level 1 cover—this was a working cover provided by Mellor Imports or GIT, depending on the situation I was faced with. Executive Outcomes was used solely for Special Forces training. The companies I dealt with as the MD of Mellor Imports or as a GIT member knew that I was a South African as I was purportedly engaged in sanctions busting. They in turn provided me with a level of protection as I had the potential to enrich them in the process.

Level 2 cover—I achieved this by piggy-backing on existing UK-based companies who appointed me as a marketing director for their African and Middle Eastern business operations. This secondary working cover provided me with an authentication back to the UK and not South Africa.

Level 3 cover—this was my deepest cover and consisted of several assumed identities complete with foreign passports, social security numbers, driver's licences and whatever else I needed. Part of my level 3 cover also made provision for a separate European passport for fast operations onto—and off—the continent.

Ron, as my chief agent, controlled six agents who reported to him using a series of dead letter boxes. He had also tapped into the London underworld to get me whatever equipment I needed for operational purposes and had, at his disposal, a surveillance team of six men. I controlled an additional seven agents with varying degrees of access in London, Portugal, and France. My four 'employees' in turn each controlled their own networks of agents, support agents, safe houses, and couriers. Over the next few days I managed to close down my networks and borrow enough money for air tickets to get my four men home.

On 5 June 1990 four 'businessmen' returned to South Africa from their last mission for the CCB. I met them at the airport and thanked them for the assistance they had given me. No one from Special Forces or the CCB was there to thank them for the risks they had taken. I briefed them on what was happening and promised never to divulge their

identities. They could go home and start new careers with clean slates. We destroyed all their false passports (and the other incriminating documents they still had on them) at the airport. They thanked me for getting them home, and then it was over. We shook hands and went our separate ways.

I had completed my mission and seen to my responsibilities. I was now an ex- CCB member.

There are many aspects of this notable period of my life that I shall never forget. As a senior CCB operative, I met many good and many not so good people. I had a mission and I gave it my very best, regardless of who I had to rub shoulders with to do it.

Some of the memories and events that will always remain with me are:

Within a relatively short time and without any help from the CCB or the SADF, we took a barren operational region and transformed it into one that boasted 'offices' and agents in Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Lebanon, and several other countries. This gave us access to passports, personalities, and even weapons and explosives when we needed them. Using front companies and cover companies, we were able to channel weapons and funds across Europe and the Middle East. It had all become so easy, yet we always fully realised the risks we were taking and never allowed complacency to creep in.

My agents remained loyal to the end, even though I felt I had vicariously betrayed them when the CCB suddenly shut down. Not once did they betray, lie to, or compromise me. They overcame daunting risks and obstacles to continually feed us the information we were after. They took their sudden dismissal with stoicism and a sense of humour that failed my understanding.

Ron had introduced me to 'friends' who I was certain were members of the British security establishment. They claimed to have been tasked to find irrefutable proof of a known connection between the ANC, the IRA, and the PLO. I had turned to Mr X, my friend from Black September, and he had been instrumental in assisting me to get weapons from the Middle East into the UK. Working with 'shadow warriors' from different countries, the weapons had been used to create a propaganda sting that enabled Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to stand up and tell the House of Commons that unassailable evidence had come to light, of cooperation between the ANC and the IRA on the terrorism front. I knew that my small role in this operation had achieved a measure of success that would hopefully buy some time for South Africa.

In June 1992 I bumped into Mr X in a hotel lobby in Paris quite by accident. We ignored each other and went our separate ways, aware that someone would probably be watching us. I never saw or heard from him after that chance encounter.

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More than a decade later I learnt about some of the things that had happened during the latter days of the CCB saga.

In October 1989, retired SADF Brigadier Heinrich Pfeil was appointed as an accountant to Special Forces and the CCB. He was refused access to CCB offices and was forced to

rely on a single go-between to obtain the necessary documentation. Although he tried his best to bring a semblance of order to the CCB's accounts, it was impossible for him to conduct a thorough audit; he could resolve only about 50% of the financial queries he raised. This expanded the cloud of suspicion over the CCB, particularly its financial management.

On 19 December 1989 Magnus Malan said that he had ordered the SADF Chief (General Jannie Geldenhuys) to conduct an internal probe with special emphasis on the Webster murder 'the moment' he had learnt about the CCB's existence and operations (or was he simply suffering from selective amnesia? More likely he was severely deficient in the balls department. Malan and Geldenhuys were both members of the Broederbond).[104]

General Geldenhuys appointed the Chief of Staff Intelligence (General 'Witkop' Badenhorst) and Deputy Chief of the Security Police (Brigadier 'Krappies' Engelbrecht) to investigate this 'unknown' organisation. Some of the findings were made known— others remained hidden to enable those in command to avoid any accountability.

By mid-January 1990, when the heat was starting to singe the CCB, Colonel Joe Verster activated an emergency plan to make all project and financial files disappear. There was, apparently, a general feeling of despair and anxiety among CCB operators who thought it likely they would be prosecuted for past activities. The incriminating evidence had to be destroyed. Verster claimed to have called someone at CCB's Headquarters and instructed this nameless person to remove all files and documentation to a safe place. This safe place was never identified. Even General Eddie Webb (who took over as chairman of the CCB with little knowledge of what it was doing or where it was being done) stated that he had no idea where the files had gone. This made Webb a convenient scapegoat for Defence Minister Magnus Malan and the generals.

On 2 February 1990, several days before I returned from the UK, the SADF admitted that the CCB was a Special Forces' covert operation aimed mainly at 'conducting surveillance of elements aggressive towards South Africa.' On the same day, State President FW de Klerk appointed a judicial Commission of Inquiry with Judge Louis Harms as its sole commissioner, and tasked it to investigate 'certain alleged murders' carried out by the CCB. De Klerk was keen to demonstrate his lack of knowledge on these covert operations and also to deflect all accountability from his person. Although the findings were never fully disclosed, investigation resulted in the arrest and detention of several senior CCB members.

After having been arrested on 2 March 1990, Colonel Joe Verster and several other CCB members were held in custody pending their appearance before the Harms Commission. A ministerial order issued on 8 March secured their release without explanation.

Generals Malan and Geldenhuys both claimed to have known nothing whatsoever about the CCB's existence and its involvement in murders or other dirty tricks. Malan continued his denials, but as Judge Harms bluntly put it, "It is an objective fact that Special Forces operations have to be approved and authorised. The Chief of the SADF (General

Geldenhuys) may, in given circumstances, grant approval for the execution of operations, but if there are political and strategic implications involved, the matter must be submitted to the Minister of Defence." Malan continued to deny any knowledge of the CCB.

It is also interesting to note that during apartheid, South Africa never had a Ministry of Defence. It had a minister and a deputy minister but the closest thing it had to a ministry was Malan's secretary. Needless to say, that placed Malan and the SADF chief directly in each other's laps. Yet they both still persisted in their denials.

Others certainly knew about the CCB. There was proof that Police General Jaap Joubert, Magnus Malan, and Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok had been aware of its existence at least as early as 1988. This was confirmed in a letter (dated 5 December 1988) relating to an officer who was 'retiring' from the SADF to join the CCB. It was signed by Magnus Malan and produced in the Pretoria Supreme Court on 7 March 1991 in support of a civil claim. Malan glibly denied that its purport had sunk in when he signed it.

The true responsibility for the CCB debacle can be squarely laid at the feet of General Malan and General Geldenhuys for having formed Region 6 in the first place. It was established as a sort of 'Murder Incorporated', sanctioned to operate within the borders of South Africa. Drawn mainly from the South African Police, its members were ill equipped to deal with covert or Special Forces operations, and operations conducted by this unit were often absurd or exceeded the bounds of normality. Not only were the murders and other criminal activities committed by Region 6 personnel poorly planned and executed, they also seemed to have no military benefit. In at least one instance, undercover operatives had incited youths in a township to leave the country for training, only to drug and ruthlessly murder them en route to the border. The truth is that, at that time, almost every black youth would have left the country to join the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, if offered the opportunity.

As explained earlier, intelligence agencies worldwide frequently assassinate enemies of the state abroad. However, it has never been the norm in democratic countries to do the same at home; the criminal justice systems supported by the police and the courts are supposed to deal with domestic offenders, except in exceptional circumstances.

General Geldenhuys's claim that he, too, knew nothing about the CCB and its activities was proved incorrect by the minutes of a CCB meeting that he had chaired on 28 April 1987.

Under Paragraph 7, titled 'Methods employed', it reflected: "Chief SADF (Geldenhuys) does not see the actions as murder and defines them as 'An attack on an individual enemy target with non-standard issue weapons in an unconventional manner so as not to affect the innocent.'"

The same minutes also note that General Geldenhuys ordered the domestic capabilities of the CCB to be doubled. Given their intimate knowledge of the CCB and their reaction to its exposure, it is small wonder that Malan and some of his generals ran for cover, loudly protesting their innocence when the bubble burst. Region 6, it appeared to me, had been created to conduct acts of personal retribution and not military importance.

On 31 July 1990, General Jannie Geldenhuys announced the final closure and disbandment of the CCB. Some of the 200 members of the organisation accepted the

meagre retirement packages the government offered or allowed themselves to be transferred to different arms of the SADF. Others demanded the more substantial retirement packages they had been promised when they joined the CCB. The SADF, however, considered its own promises to have been excessive. Some members launched civil actions against the government, claiming monies in excess of R30 million. The government tried to thwart this by announcing its intention to introduce legislation to indemnify the state against such claims. In the event, it would be many months before we were finally paid our 'retirement packages'.

My claim against the CCB, supported with the relevant documentation, was in excess of £220 000, 00. Although I was told that the CCB was under no obligation to refund me these costs, General Witkop Badenhorst told me, in later years, that the funds had indeed been made available to pay me, but someone else had collected them.

The CCB was one of the first victims of the great political and military betrayal that took place in South Africa. This had nothing to do with the ANC's rise to power or the collapse of the National Party government; rather, it had to do with finding scapegoats for apartheid's misdeeds. The once proud and powerful SADF's General Staff also demonstrated an abysmal lack of backbone.

Looking back at this bleak period of our country's bloodstained history, it should be remembered that most members of the Security Forces fought, either because they had volunteered after being convinced their country was being besieged by forces who wanted to tum it into a communist state, or because the law demanded they be called up for service.

As a professional soldier I was willing to serve whichever government was in power, regardless of what they stood for. I had no interest in politics. All I expected in return for my loyalty and expertise was that the government I served be loyal to me in return. There were many others who felt that way. Sadly, our politicians viewed it differently.

Many years later I discovered that the CCB's demise had already been inevitable while it had been busy recruiting me to establish and run Region 5.

05:
Rising from the Dust

It took me several weeks to come to terms with the manner in which we had been betrayed by our spineless generals and self-serving politicians—recovering from a knife in the back is never easy. I considered myself a second-hand soldier[105] and discarded covert operative, and I had absolutely no idea what to do with the rest of my life.

I had also incorrectly believed that the men of Region 6 who had instigated the problems would be dealt with in the harshest possible terms, and that the CCB would continue its work. I couldn't have been more wrong.

It was difficult to accept that I had been fired from the SADF after more than sixteen years of loyal and dedicated service. Like many of my unknown CCB colleagues who faced a similar fate, I was never court-martialled or found guilty of any offence. Our service records were unblemished. Our crime was simply that we had done our jobs. Our reward was being shown the door.

I had come out of the shooting war into the Cold War, often laying my life on the line in the pursuance of my orders. Despite countless statements to the contrary, President FW de Klerk had turned on his armed forces, and his generals had promptly followed suit. I was just one of many serving professional soldiers who had become victims of cowardice and political expediency, and I was deeply angered by the betrayal.

During the media feeding frenzy that followed the CCB's exposure, I grew more uneasy as each new revelation surfaced, and experienced a sense of disgust at ever having been associated with such out-of-control, untrained, and irresponsible elements, albeit only by name.

Not all of the problems were in my head either. I was broke and heavily indebted. Apart from having lost more than £220 000—earned through my business activities in Europe while operating for the CCB—I also owed a substantial sum to the friends who had helped me get my four men home. With a certain amount of panic, I realised I had very few employment options outside of the military. I didn't have a university degree or much business experience, apart from what Brian Mellor had taught me and the limited practical experience gained while operating undercover. Fortunately I didn't have much time to feel sorry for myself either. I had to find something to do—fast.

With such limited choices available to me, I seriously considered options not entirely legal. At that stage of my life even bank robbery seemed like an attractive career option.

What I did have was Executive Outcomes, the company through which I was providing training for the South African Special Forces. I was also still a member of Geo International Trading, although circumstances had kept me away from actual involvement. I suspected Bingo Kruger and 'Witte' van Heerden would have been much happier if I'd just disappeared altogether. They had no idea that I had used GIT purely as a cover and for financial purposes.

If I wished to live a semblance of a decent life, I would have to market Executive Outcomes aggressively. Fortunately, the Special Forces training programmes would allow me a respectable—albeit irregular—income. I would, however, have to supplement that if I was to survive in the new world we were entering.

Like everybody else, the clinical psychologist who co-owned the company wasn't aware of my CCB ties. He wasn't exactly a workaholic either, so I knew he wouldn't mind giving me complete ownership of the company. If I ever needed his assistance, I could simply sub-contract him. And with a full-scale investigation into the CCB looming, the sooner we broke ties, the better it would be for him. He agreed to my suggestion, and shortly thereafter I became the sole owner of Executive Outcomes.

They say fortune sometimes smiles when one least expects it. It was about to grin at me. Before the dust had even started swirling around the CCB's exposure, Special Forces asked me to present yet another training programme for their operatives. This would help take my mind off the ever-deepening pit into which the CCB was sinking. Fortunately, my involvement had not yet been exposed, so I was able to continue as though I didn't have a care in the world.

Then a CCB contact I had worked with in Portugal called and asked if I would be willing to travel to South America to meet with a South American Drug Enforcement Agency (SADEA) who was looking for some advice and assistance. Unbeknown to me, my CCB contact in Portugal had been a SADEA operative working under cover.

I didn't need much prompting. The SADEA were prepared to fund all my travel and hotel expenses and I was quick to board an aircraft to see if I could get involved in the South American drug wars. Perhaps, I surmised, this might be the new career I was looking for. I had read enough about the drug wars to know that it would be a dangerous field to work in, but then I had spent a substantial amount of time in dangerous areas and was not unfamiliar with jungle or urban battlefields.

My flight was routed via Lisbon where I met 'Fernando', my contact with the SADEA. During the long flight to South America, he told me what their main problems were, and I took copious notes. By the time we landed, I had already developed some possible options.

My meeting with the SADEA went very well. I couldn't speak Spanish, but the officers I met spoke English with varying degrees of competence and Fernando acted as an interpreter where necessary. Their English was, in any case, far superior to my Spanish. I was asked to give a brief overview of my military career and share my ideas about how the drug wars could be fought and won.

My suggestions included the following elements:

Strategic review: The strategy needed to be revised as it was not giving the results it ought to have. A revised strategy would also give rise to different options on how to proceed. This strategy would require political and SADEA will to drive it aggressively.

Intelligence team: We would set up a comprehensive intelligence team that would operate outside of normal intelligence channels, and build up an extensive picture of the drug lords, the cartels and syndicates, their supporters, and their modus operandi. It would

also identify their crop growing areas, the routes into them, and the locations of their factories and facilities. To ensure that the team received no tainted or unconfirmed information to work from, there would be no liaison whatsoever with other intelligence services. It would also build up specific profiles for targeted individuals, their contacts, and their processing areas. This team would work both internally and beyond their borders.

Offensive Action Team: We would select and train a small team of men (no more than 50) who would take the war into the jungle to do battle with the drug lords and their private armies. The team members would be soldiers without families to prevent awkward where, why, and how questions if they happened to be killed. This team would be given intensive training in all forms of clandestine and covert operations and become the spear that would be driven into the drug trade. It would have its own air mobile component to ensure rapid deployment. Support Team: This team would provide all the support required by the Intelligence and Offensive Action Teams, including the bugging of houses, facilities, and vehicles. These men would also be responsible for aspects such as surveillance and counter-surveillance, electronic countermeasures, aerial surveillance of identified target areas, and helicopter support during deployment operations by the Offensive Action Team.

We spent several hours a day discussing strategies, operational designs, training, doctrine, deployment procedures for operational purposes, policies, weapons and equipment, weak and strong points, and modi operandi. Each meeting was tape- recorded. The SADEA officers were excited about the concept and agreed that the only way to overcome the scourge of the drug lords was to take the fight to them and their supporters. I had, according to them, provided them with the best solution yet and they were in a hurry to get started.

They requested I immediately draw up a working budget so that they could plan and release the finances for the operation as soon as possible. On the fourth day we made arrangements to finalise the entire project and confirm the timeline for implementation at a meeting in the United States a few weeks later. The training and deployment would commence as soon as possible.

I was given USD 10 000 for my expenses, and Fernando and I left the following day. In Lisbon we said our goodbyes and I returned to South Africa to wait for instructions from the SADEA who, it was agreed, would liaise directly with me.

In late March 1990 I began presenting another Special Forces training programme. Midway through, the new GOC Special Forces, Brigadier JC Swart, called me to his office. My heart froze. I thought he was about to expose my role in the CCB. Instead, he gave me a gigantic bear hug and thanked me for the ‘excellent work’ I was doing. I must have appeared visibly relieved when I walked out of the building.

In mid-April, the SADEA called to say they would not be able to make use of my services. Apparently, the American DEA had threatened to withhold finances and support if they went ahead with the project.

"We are really sorry about this, Eeben, because we think it is a great plan, but if the USA discovers that we have made use of your services, we will be in a very difficult situation," the officer said.

"Well, I'm sorry too," I said, wondering why the US didn't want the drug trade stopped, "The plan will work with or without me but if the US is threatening you I can understand your reluctance to continue."

"We would like to start implementing your plan if that is okay with you. Perhaps you may wish to visit us in a while and see how we are doing?"

"I don't mind if you use the plan," I replied, "After all, I devised it especially for you. I would just dearly have loved to be part of it."

I was obviously very disappointed but I had to get on with life.

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In May 1991 I received a phone call from Herman Walsh, the Chief Engineer, Security, for the De Beers Diamond group. He had heard about the training that Executive Outcomes was doing for Special Forces and wanted to meet me. So much for secrecy, I thought, but I agreed to meet him at his Johannesburg office.

Not wanting to appear over-anxious to do business with De Beers (or any other company for that matter) I delayed the meeting for a few days. When we eventually met, Herman started by explaining that a family member who had attended one of my courses had thought the approaches and principles I taught would work equally well in countering the illicit diamond trade. This, at least, assured me that Executive Outcomes' Special Forces programme had not been compromised in any way.

De Beers was losing untold millions of dollars per year to illegal diamond trafficking and Herman wanted to know if I could provide a workable solution. He didn't care what the methods were as long as they yielded positive results.

I submitted several proposals to Herman, all of which his superior—Ed Knoessen, an ex-policeman—turned down. I wasn't too surprised and took this as a touch of professional jealousy. Herman nevertheless encouraged me to continue seeking new approaches and assured me that he would finally get approval.

One option I suggested was the preparation and deployment of agents and agent handlers—who would be guided and directed by controllers—to infiltrate and penetrate the illicit diamond-dealing syndicates and systematically collect actionable intelligence.

Collection efforts would be supported by technical and other means which would also provide security for the agents. The intelligence they gathered would be used, either to ensure further exploitation of the syndicates' planning, or disrupt or neutralise them using joint De Beers and South African Police assets. My plan was to build an intelligence organisation that could monitor every move the syndicates made, manipulate selected syndicate members, and allow us to follow their trails from the source of the stolen uncut diamonds to the point of sale anywhere in the world.

Despite Knoessen's reservations and resistance, Herman approved the plan and asked me to submit a comprehensive proposal detailing the approach and financial implications.

"I'm concerned that this is taking so long to finalise," Herman told me a few days later. "We need to get your plan off the ground in a hurry so we can stop what is happening and maybe recover some of our losses. Our guys in Namibia and Botswana are also keen to meet you and discuss the possibility of training, but you'd have to go there.'

"That's no problem," I said, "Just let me know how you want to do it and I'll slot in with your plans."

A few days later Herman called and told me that Bill Phaphe, the Chief of Security at Debswana (the De Beers diamond operation in Botswana) was on his way to Johannesburg; we could meet at the De Beer's offices.

Bill was a huge man with a great sense of humour and we hit it off immediately, especially when I told him I had gone to school in Francistown, and that Botswana had been my first target country when I had worked as a Military Intelligence case officer. He seemed relieved that my past was out in the open and after that it never became an issue.

As the Debswana Chief of Security, Bill was responsible for ensuring that an effective loss-control procedure was in place at their facilities in both the north and the south of Botswana.

"Herman has discussed your plan with me and I really like it. Do you think there will be any problems implementing it once the training has been completed?" he asked.

"I know the plan will work. We just need the right people for the job. Picking them will obviously be your responsibility as you know your men far better than I ever will. However, I'll be available if you want to use me as a sounding board."

I added that he needed to ensure a close liaison with the Botswana Police to affect arrests when necessary, and ensure due legal process against any diamond-related crimes.

"Okay, let's assume we go ahead with the training. What about special equipment? Will you be able to supply what we need?" Bill asked.

"Yes, but I don't think you should rush out and buy anything yet. We should approach this one-step-at-a-time. Equipment can be purchased once we have an idea what direction we're heading in."

Herman, who until then had just listened, agreed and said he had one hundred percent faith in me and my capabilities. Bill accepted this judgement and said he was keen to commence training some of his men and implementing my plan, which he believed had great merit. Using guidelines provided by the two security chiefs and my own experiences in the world of covert operations, I developed the Debswana training programme aimed at preparing selected employees to infiltrate the illicit diamond-dealing syndicates.

Known as the 'Crime and Intelligence Management Programme', it covered diverse subjects such as:

1. An introduction to crime and intelligence.
2. An introduction to intelligence collection
3. Analysts, case officers, sources, and agents
4. Basic intelligence tradecraft
5. Role of agents in combating crime
6. Surveillance operations in support of counter-crime organisations

7. Crime and intelligence liaison
8. Developing crime and intelligence structures
9. Crime and intelligence administration
10. The basic principles of security
11. Developing crime and intelligence plans
12. Leadership and management-leading

The programme was bound into two thick volumes and issued to Debswana trainees that Bill had hand-picked and vetted. Herman was very supportive of the training of the Debswana operatives. Knoessen remained doubtful.

A few days later I started presenting the programmes at a 'safe' De Beers facility in Gaberone. It was great fun as the students were keen to learn and a pleasure to work with. Bill often popped in to question them on their views about the training. He also questioned me on progress and on which men I thought would turn out to be the best case officers and which the best undercover operatives.

Over the next few years I presented several such programmes for Debswana's operatives and also advised them on equipment for covert operations.

By then the South African Special Forces' training programmes were running smoothly and they also asked me to source and procure specific covert surveillance equipment for them despite the international sanctions against South Africa. Using contacts I had built up while operating in Europe and those I had met at COPEX, I was able to get them virtually anything they wanted. The equipment would be shipped to one country and the documentation changed before transshipment to South Africa. The sellers were usually well aware that South Africa would be the final destination for their products.

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In early-1990 John Rankin decided to move from Cyprus and settle in South Africa. He spoke to me at length about his impending move and finally decided to settle in Pretoria with his family. Together we set up a company named Barlow Rankin Management Services (BRMS) and entered the business of sourcing and selling military hardware. With the contacts BRMS already had, we were well positioned to source virtually anything an army might require, providing they had the money and were able to supply the manufacturer with valid end-user certificates.

We still used John's Cyprus-based company to establish contact with 'sensitive' clients. John claimed to have been part of the team involved in US Marine Colonel Oliver North's 'Irangate'[106] operation and he assured me he knew his way around the arms market.

I was determined to keep BRMS and Executive Outcomes at arm's length from one another as John had nothing to do with training Special Forces operatives. I also considered the Special Forces training a highly classified project and had no wish to compromise it.

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During the last week of August 1991 one of my old CCB agents contacted me and told me it was rumoured that an Air Uganda Boeing was about to be used to transport South African-manufactured weapons and ammunition to Yugoslavia. According to him, the aircraft would be departing from Mmabathu International Airport.[107] I phoned Nico Palm at Armscor and told him what I had heard. Nico in turn spoke to his superiors who again told him to keep his nose out of their affairs.

On 2 September 1991 the Afrikaans daily newspaper Beeld ran a report which said an Air Uganda aircraft with nineteen tons of South African weapons and ammunition on board had been intercepted and forced to land by the Yugoslavian Air Force.

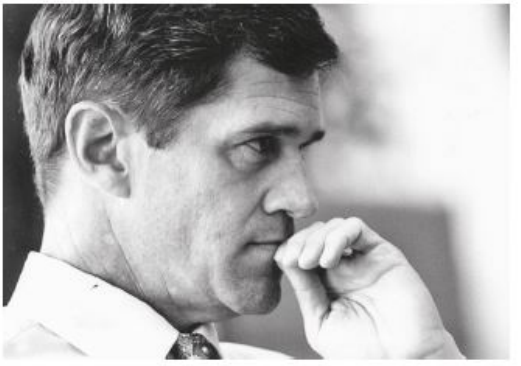
According to a statement by the Yugoslavian government the aircraft and its freight had been bound for Slovenia. Armscor denied having sold the weapons, despite a Canadian-born Croat on board the aircraft having admitted that the materiel had indeed been purchased from Armscor.

Once more I could not understand why Armscor hadn't taken heed of my warning. It appeared to me that collective denial was their approach to solving problems.

On 2 September 1991 The Citizen reported:

[according to an Armscor spokesman] 'South Africa has no contract to supply weaponry to parties involved in the Yugoslavia-Croatian conflict. The spokesman was commenting on a report which said the Yugoslav Defence Ministry had impounded 19 tons of South African rifles, mines, and ammunition on board a Ugandan Airlines Boeing 707 after an intense firefight at Zagreb airport in Yugoslavia. 'The arms were accompanied by the Croatian-Canadian who took delivery of them in South Africa,' said a Yugoslav Defence Ministry spokesman.'

South Africa's new Minister of Defence, Roelf Meyer (a man whose 'military experience' came from having been a lance-corporal choir-boy in the South African Air Force[108] and who appeared ill-equipped to handle defence issues) declined to comment on what was happening within his ministry. He didn't even bother to comment on the blatant disregard of international sanctions. Like Malan, his predecessor, Meyer probably thought the matter would simply fade away if he said nothing.



Roelf Meyer, the singing lance corporal- cum-minister of defence who was ill-equipped to handle defence matters (photo: African Leadership Initiative)

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On 28 October 1991 Herman flew me to Oranjemund in Namibia where I met the De Beers security chief, Roger Burchell. Burchell made it abundantly clear that he didn't want me hanging around in his back yard despite the huge and frequently mentioned losses they were suffering at the hands of illegal diamond traders. I could only surmise that he didn't feel comfortable with an outsider who might step on his toes. As Oranjemund's security chief, that was his prerogative.

In late 1991, I was asked to develop a new counter-espionage programme for Special Forces and went back to the drawing board for programme development. The aim of the new programme was to train selected Special Forces operatives to identify, recruit, and manage foreign agents operating within their own ranks and run them as double agents. Effectively, such students would become the spies that watched the spies. The new programme was referred to as 'Specialised Intelligence Gathering Part 3: Counter Espionage' (Hanorie 3) and covered aspects such as:

- Introduction to counter-intelligence
- Role of counter-intelligence
- Operational security
- Psychological techniques
- Objectives of counter-intelligence
- Selected foreign intelligence services
- Notions about counter-espionage in South Africa
- Travel planning
- Introduction to technical means (bugs, taps, counter-measures, etc.)
- Passive or indirect methods of counter-espionage

- Offensive or direct methods of counter-espionage
- Offensive and defensive driving techniques
- Double-agent operations

The Special Forces' coordinator for this particular training programme was Colonel JAB Swart, an ex-sapper, ex-paratrooper, and then Senior Staff Officer Counter Intelligence for Special Forces. I had at one time served as an engineer troop commander in a squadron he commanded, but we had never been friends. In fact, we once had a serious disagreement on how to conduct counter-mine operations when I was serving as a sapper officer in the SWA operational area. Swart had also been a student of mine on Hanorie 1. He was no relation to the GOC Special Forces, Brigadier Jake Swart.

Prior to presenting this new programme I had sponsored Swart to attend an international military exercise in Switzerland. Little had I realised how this would adversely affect me in the future.

I hadn't considered the sponsorship to be an incentive to secure training programmes for Special Forces; Swart had no influence over the allocation of funds for the training I was conducting in any case. That was commissioned by Colonel Prinsloo and approved by Brigadier Swart. At the time I merely saw it as private assistance to a Special Forces officer—an act that had the blessing of the General Officer Commanding.

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In early February 1992, the first cracks were beginning to show in Geo International Trading. Nico told me he suspected that someone in Armscor was trying to link him to GIT; the Armscor security division had been told to investigate him and his 'relationship' with the company. The allegation had stemmed from an Armscor sub-contractor who believed GIT's business activities had impacted negatively on their profit margins.

"I wouldn't worry too much," I told him over the phone. "You only asked GIT to quote on products or locate local manufacturers who could. That's standard Armscor practice. They should actually give you a medal; you've saved the SADF millions of Rands by having products manufactured locally instead of importing them at great cost and risk."

"That's easy for you to say," Nico said, "but they've been investigating me ever since I reported that bloody Blowpipe thing. Now it's getting worse and I'm finding it increasingly difficult to work with a sword dangling over my head."

"Then I had better tell you something you don't know," I said. "Let's meet and discuss it."

We met the following morning and I told him I had been a member of the CCB and used Geo International Trading as a cover to generate funds for my operations in Europe and the Middle East. I had also used him to provide support for me without him knowing about it.

Nico was shocked.

"I had no idea. I thought you had resigned from Military Intelligence," he exclaimed.

"You weren't supposed to know I was still operational. I also used you as a conduit to feed information into Armscor to prevent anything from embarrassing South Africa and the SADF. I hoped they would take action but obviously someone in Armscor didn't want that to happen. It's just a shame that this has led to you being investigated. But don't worry about it. You did nothing wrong and I'll discuss the situation with Major General Joep Joubert and see how we can help you."

Joep Joubert had, at one time, been the chairman of the CCB.

"This whole thing is getting out of hand. I'm now being accused of corruption and I don't like it."

"I know you weren't corrupt," I reassured him.

I didn't want Nico to get into trouble for having unwittingly been used by the CCB. I knew that General Joubert would hear me out and help him.

In March 1992 Herman Walsh again asked for assistance. De Beers was losing a large quantity of diamonds from its core mining operation in Kimberley.

I suggested he put a couple of operatives on the ground and get them to infiltrate the diamond syndicates.

"Provided your people play it safe, they will find out who is doing what and that should resolve your problem."

"Can you help us find two trained and experienced operatives?" Herman asked. "I realise we'll have to help you with their cover, but perhaps you can give me advice on the planning and teach us how to run them as agents."

I drew up a short-list of possible operatives for De Beers. Two names stood out. The first was Jim Ross, who I knew from my 32 Battalion days. Jim was a very competent company commander who had proved himself during the shooting war. He left the Battalion long before I did, and also went to DCC, and I knew he was quite capable of handling himself in difficult situations. We had never worked together, but he had proved himself a good agent handler.

The second was Len Struwig. Len worked for Electronic Magnetic Logistical Component Technical Consultants and Manufacturers (EMLC)—a Special Forces front company that developed and provided technical support. As well as working closely with Special Forces on technical matters, Len had been trained in intelligence collection and electronic and counter-measures on one of my courses. He had also been nominated to attend a counter-espionage programme I was about to present.

They were both good men and I felt certain they would be able to find out what was happening with the diamonds in Kimberley. I introduced them to Herman and his superior (Brigadier Ed Knoessen) who conducted interviews and appointed both as De Beers security officers. Len, however, first had to complete the pending counter-espionage course.

Hanorie 3 was presented over the period 4–24 May 1992. I made several comments in a secret report to Colonel JAB Swart dated 8 June:

1. Refresher training should be conducted once a year
2. New policies and directives aimed at counter-espionage should be formulated

3. New deployment areas should be identified for the trained operatives and they should be given access to specialist equipment in order to achieve their mission

At the conclusion of this programme, Colonel Prinsloo asked me to procure a highly sensitive counter-measures system that would allow them to regularly sweep and debug their offices at Special Forces HQ. Through the many contacts I had from COPEX, I was able to source and provide this sophisticated piece of equipment together with other technical means required to ensure electronic security.

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Meanwhile, things weren't going well on the GIT front. We were about to learn that no good deed goes unpunished.

In early July, security personnel literally escorted Nico from the Armscor building and charged him with corruption for his alleged role in GIT. Bingo, Witte, and I were also in trouble.

I decided the time was ripe to approach Major General Joubert and discuss the situation with him. Until then I had quietly hoped the whole affair would simply fade away and die a quiet death, but it hadn't. I met the general in his office early on the morning of 14 July and told him about Nico's unwitting role in the CCB.

He listened, made some notes and a few phone calls, told me he would check and confirm the validity of my story, and ordered me to be back in his office early the next morning.

On the morning of 15 July, General Joubert handed me a copy of a letter he had written to JN Coetzee of Armscor, in which he explained Nico's situation and outlined his supporting role in the Region's CCB operations. Extracts of his letter (translated from Afrikaans) read as follows:

The South African Defence Force (SADF) is fully aware of the planned disciplinary action against Mr N Palm scheduled for 16 July 1992.

The following is placed on record:

(a) Mr N Palm acted solely as a support agent.

(b) Mr N Palm supplied highly sensitive support of a very high quality.

(c) At no stage did Mr N Palm receive any financial advantage from either GIT or the Organisation.

(d) Mr N Palm acted in good faith and in the national interest.

(e) Even Armscor gained both direct and indirect advantage through Mr Palm's activities.

(f) Both myself as well as members of Chief of Staff Intelligence are fully aware of Mr Palm's involvement and activities.

General Joubert asked Armscor to treat his letter as 'strictly confidential' but they disregarded his request and leaked the information to the media.

In August a special SAP Fraud Squad task force raided the offices of an Armscor sub-contractor and seized documents relating to illegal international arms deals. Among the

cases investigated was the arms shipment that contravened the UN arms embargo against Yugoslavia. It was confirmed that an Air Uganda Boeing 707 carrying 19 tons of rifles, mines, and ammunition (all with South African markings) had been forced to land in Zagreb. This debacle could have been avoided if someone in Armscor had been willing to pay attention to the information I had passed to Nico.

In spite of General Joubert's intervention, a court prosecution was launched against Nico and GIT. The hearing dragged on throughout September and part of October 1992 and in the end we were all found guilty of having conducted business in an 'incorrect manner'. Nico was additionally found guilty of fraud and corruption. To recover costs supposedly lost by the company that laid the complaint, my car was confiscated and sold, despite me only having been found guilty of using GIT as a CCB cover.

"How the hell is this possible?" I asked our advocate, "GIT did everything by the book and according to Armscor regulations, but we've still been found guilty. I think this is being done to prevent corrupt Armscor officials from being exposed. "

"Well, Bingo Kruger was working for a company that was involved with the defence industry and they believed GIT got contracts that should have been awarded to them."

"But the company he worked for was never involved in providing such products to Armscor," I argued.

''I'm afraid you guys have no clue what and who you are up against," the advocate replied. "If you want my advice, just leave things as they are."

With that sound advice from the legal profession, I decided to walk away from everything. I adopted the ostrich approach, stuck my head in the sand, and ignored everything that was happening around me.

Nico, meanwhile, lost his job. He was also sentenced to imprisonment but he launched an appeal. The High Court overturned his conviction several years later.

Bingo and Witte went their own ways and we never spoke again.

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At around this time I was approached by a visiting military attaché from the Pakistan High Commissioner's office. The colonel (I cannot recall his name) was planning to be in South Africa for a few days and he asked to meet to discuss a possible business arrangement.

"I know you're doing some sensitive work for South African Special Forces. Would you consider doing the same in Pakistan?"

I was taken aback by his question. I had no problem helping Pakistan, but I was surprised that he had contacted me, and asked where he had heard about me.

"We are a nation under increasing siege by the West and we are always on the lookout for men with skills we don't possess. A family member of mine works for one of your clients and he told me about you. We would like to know how you would structure a Special Forces element to conduct missions in the disputed areas of Kashmir."

"Drawing up an outline for a team of that kind is relatively easy," I said, "I would, however, need to be on the ground to assess the terrain. That will determine the tactics of

deployment."

"I agree," the colonel said. "Could you draw up a basic working document for me to take back to Pakistan? I leave in three days' time."

I agreed, and three days later we met to discuss my working document. He told me he would contact me in a few days to arrange for me to visit Pakistan for a final assessment.

"Of course, this must be considered highly confidential," he said as we shook hands and parted company.

Executive Outcomes' ability to procure highly classified, sensitive, clandestine, and covert surveillance equipment from Europe and the US was also becoming known within the intelligence community, and over a period of time, South Africa's National Intelligence Service (NIS) purchased several pieces of covert surveillance equipment through my company. Lady Luck had finally favoured my business.

Several suppliers I had met at COPEX were more than happy to do business with me and I was soon able to offer Special Forces, NIS, and Debswana virtually anything they needed for clandestine or covert operations. Money, it seemed, was the perfect foil to any sanctions that the UN might have imposed.

Barlow Rankin Management Services was also active in the arms market, and John and I spent many a hectic day sourcing and procuring military hardware for and from clients the world over. We even secured a contract to supply 5.56mm ammunition to the Hong Kong Police during their preparations for the Asian Games. The contacts we built up through BRMS allowed us access to virtually anything we needed to lay our hands on.

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Sometime in June 1992 Colonel Swart of Special Forces asked me to provide cover for Commandant Julius Kratz,[109] a counter-espionage officer who had passed through my training programmes. I discussed this with John and we agreed to accommodate Kratz at BRMS. Maybe Kratz's mission was to check on us, or perhaps I had trained him too well, for he was soon privy to everything that BRMS was doing and he worked hard at sabotaging us passively.

Over the coming months we helped Swart and Kratz to establish a separate front company (registered as Millfield Management Services) for their operations as we didn't want them linked too closely with BRMS. We spent some time familiarising Kratz with the business environment he would be operating in and offered to assist him wherever possible.

Unfortunately, he manipulated John, who soon began to trust him implicitly. I didn't mind if Kratz's mission was only to keep an eye on what we were up to, but I became suspicious when he asked for some telephone encryption equipment for an operation.

"That's easy," I said, "I'll source it from the UK. What exactly do you want, analogue or digital?"

"I'm not sure—tell me what you suggest. If I place the order with you what's in it for me?"

"If you expect me to pay a bribe to secure an order, you can shove the order up your arse," I said.

I had no idea if this was some sort of test to see if BRMS was willing to pay bribes to secure orders. I reported the incident to Colonel Swart and to the Chief of Staff Intelligence's Counter-Intelligence Operations team.

Swart shrugged off the implications. CI Ops took it more seriously and asked me to monitor Kratz's behaviour carefully—which I did. Another reason for concern was that the equipment he had asked for was 'sensitive' in terms of its deployment; the order should actually have been channelled through Executive Outcomes and not BRMS. I discussed this with John but he disagreed with me.

Kratz subsequently began to smear me and started playing John and I off against one another. I realised that the end was in sight for BRMS when John started becoming closer to Kratz, and putting more faith in him than he should have. I warned John that Kratz was playing a double game and left it at that. It was for John to decide what he wanted to do. I, however, suspected that Kratz was passing confidential company information to his friends in the business community and I later discovered that my suspicions were well founded.

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In October 1992 the Pakistani Armed Forces invited me to visit their country to discuss my basic proposal. I flew to Islamabad a few days later and was met at my hotel by a Special Forces colonel and two majors. With them was the officer who had initially approached me.

The next morning I was flown to a remote base in Kashmir where I was given several briefings on the situation in the area. I was also provided with a uniform and equipment, and made aware of the problems they were experiencing, their modus operandi, the tactics the opposing Indian forces were utilising, and their weaponry. The next evening I went out with a small Special Forces patrol and was able to assess tactics for the terrain and gain some insight into the different options they could employ. I well recall the heat of the day and the extreme coldness of the evenings while I was there.

When I returned to South Africa a week later, I drew up a final proposal for the Pakistani Special Forces and delivered it to their High Commissioner's office.

I hoped I would soon hear from them, but I never did.

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In November 1992, I flew to London with Herman Walsh to introduce him to Phillip Hoy of Matra Marconi Space, which was developing airborne surveillance systems. I had previously investigated aerial surveillance technology for De Beers while working for Brian Mellor, but nothing had ever come of it.

During the flight Herman informed me that Jim Ross and Len Struwig had been placed undercover in Kimberley, and that De Beers no longer required any input from me as far as planning their mission or running operatives was concerned.

I was surprised at this sudden change of plan, for I knew that neither Herman nor Ed Knoessen had any experience managing high-risk covert operations. Herman was adamant, however, and stressed that none of my concerns would change the minds of the bosses at De Beers. I warned him that running agents was complex and dangerous and told him that if he played with fire he could get burnt. I was particularly concerned about the operation and both agents being compromised in the media. My concerns would, at a later date, prove to have been well founded.

We met Phillip at Marconi's offices at Borehamwood and Herman outlined the problem that De Beers was experiencing at its Oranjemund diamond mine in Namibia. Although public access to the area was forbidden, the adjacent coastline made mining operations vulnerable to penetration from the sea and this could not be allowed to continue.

Phillip explained the various solutions that Marconi could offer at great length. Herman was willing to try anything that might yield a positive result. I told him I believed De Beers was going for overkill to neutralise the problem and reminded him that technology was only as good as the person operating it, but that wasn't what he wanted to hear.

As he considered himself a scientist, he tended to look for scientific solutions to problems. In that area, of course, I was completely out of my depth.

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When I arrived back in South Africa I found that BRMS was beginning to fall apart. Julius Kratz had been stirring the pot in my absence, suggesting that John should have a share of Executive Outcomes' profits. When John confronted me on the subject I pointed out that I was working 18 to 20 hours a day while he was only working eight. He was also making no contribution whatsoever to Executive Outcomes and for him to take part in training Special Forces he would need a security clearance which it would be impossible for him to get. Nor did he have the experience.

We had a very serious disagreement and John clearly saw the writing on the wall as far as our business relationship was concerned. The atmosphere in the offices became tense and John seemed to realise that Kratz had taken him for a fool but he was too proud to admit it. I personally believed that BRMS had a great future but the damage caused by Kratz couldn't be ignored. In early December 1992 BRMS closed its doors and John and his family returned to Cyprus.

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In January 1993 I was phoned by Colonel Larney Keller, an ex-Signals Corps officer I had met several years before on my return trip from Turkey with Reutech. At the time of our first meeting, Larney had been helping Reutech to develop radio communications equipment but he too had been retrenched from the SADF and was running his own business, trying to do whatever he could in the export and import markets. We met for a chat and Larney suggested I share his office with him and see if we could develop synergy

between our businesses. With BRMS having shut its doors I was working from an empty bedroom in my Pretoria home, so I gladly accepted his offer.

There weren't many options open to us in the business world, but we looked around to see what we could find. We even got involved in trying to help Chinese nationals to get work permits in South Africa, but we weren't very successful in that venture.

In late February 1993, Larney discussed what he called a 'sensitive issue' with me.

"A friend from England called me last night…it seems he has a delicate problem and thinks you might be able to assist," Larney said. "He and a friend are visiting South Africa soon."

"But why would he want to see me?" I asked.

"I told him about your military background. He is ex-SAS."

"If he is ex-SAS he could be working under some sort of cover," I said. "Do you think they want us to do something that will give the British government credible deniability?"

"No, I don't think he's a spook," Larney said, "I think you should meet him and see what he has to say. He may have something good for us."

A couple of evenings later Larney phoned and told me that his friend Simon had arrived and I should come over and meet him. Larney introduced me to Simon Mann[110] and his associate, Tony Buckingham. It was a meeting that would lead to a close working relationship in the years to come, although the road ahead would often be a rocky one.

It was immediately evident that Buckingham was the leader and Simon Mann the suitcase carrier. Buckingham could best have been described as one of those swashbuckling, suntanned, adventurous Englishmen who belong to a dying breed. He had a ready laugh and was easy to get along with.

Simon had a quieter disposition but was keen to show that he was knowledgeable about matters military. He seemed like a good guy, but there was something about him that warned me off. I got the impression that he felt the same way about me.

They made it clear that they were both seasoned soldiers who had served in the SAS and the SBS[111] and taken part in many 'hush-hush, nudge-nudge, wink-wink' operations for Her Majesty's government, but I wasn't particularly interested and didn't press them for details.

Chomping on a fat Cuban cigar—his trademark—Buckingham told me that he was the chief executive of Heritage Oil & Gas and its subsidiary Ranger Oil. His company was involved in oil exploration and drilling off the Angolan coast, but they had run into a 'minor problem'.

Tony Buckingham with his trademark cigar. He initially contracted EO to provide security to his recovery teams at Soyo

"My company has some valuable drilling equipment in Soyo, a small harbour town in northern Angola with several onshore facilities and a harbour that is of vital importance to Angola's oil industry," Buckingham said. "You may or may not know this, but UNITA has overrun the town and captured it from the government forces.[112] The equipment has been hired, so it's costing an absolute fortune in lease fees, and we can't even use it because we can't get close to move it."

I knew that despite statements to the contrary, the South African government had continued giving covert support to UNITA and that was keeping the region unstable. I could understand how this impacted on companies like Heritage Oil, Ranger Oil, Texaco, Elf, and others working in the area.

"Can't you just ask UNITA for permission to load the equipment? They surely have no use for it?" I suggested.

"Well, I did ask them to give it back to me. I told them I want no part in their war I just want the kit out of Soyo because it's costing me more than $20 000 a day in lease fees alone. They were pretty straightforward with their answer—they told me to fuck off," laughed Buckingham.

"Okay and what do you want me to do about it?" I asked.

"I thought maybe you could secure the area for us," Buckingham responded.

"So do you want me to put together a team, fly to Soyo and ask UNITA to lend a hand loading this kit of yours?" I asked.

"No, not exactly," Buckingham chuckled. "The Angolan Army is about to launch an assault on Soyo to recapture the harbour and the town. I need you to provide security for our recovery teams once the place has been captured. Larney says you're familiar with Angola and that you operated with a reconnaissance team there during the war."

"I know a little bit about the country but I'm hardly an expert. Let's just say I've seen parts of it," I replied.

I wondered why men who claimed to be so well versed in the art of war wanted to discuss what they considered a 'small problem' with me. Surely, I thought, it should be no big deal for them to resolve it themselves.

Buckingham explained that his company had been awarded a number of oil exploration concessions. The Angolan government, in turn, was anxious to reap as much oil revenue as possible to finance their ongoing war with UNITA.

Buckingham was concerned that the government might baulk at awarding his company further concessions—or even cancel the concessions already awarded to him if Heritage Oil and Gas didn't come online soon.

"I'm only worried about the war as such insofar as it affects my business. As far as I'm concerned they can go ahead and wipe each other out. I just want to get our kit off the fucking harbour so we can get back to pumping oil," Buckingham said.

Since overrunning Soyo, UNITA had kept everyone out of the town and away from the docks. Buckingham had recently overflown the area but seen few signs of recent UNITA activity, and estimated that UNITA had only a minimal presence there. People he had spoken to in Britain's Foreign Office had confirmed this.

"My guess is that UNITA has about a platoon there and that's tops."

He repeated his grave concerns about the equipment and stressed that its loss would cost his company millions of dollars.

"So tell me exactly what you want me to do," I said.

"Can you put together a team to guard the recovery operation? The Angolan government has assured us they will attack, recapture, and hold Soyo, but they say it's not the army's job to safeguard private property. In my opinion, they are so fucking useless they probably won't even be prepared to fight UNITA if it comes down to the wire."

"I don't have a quarrel with UNITA, except for the fact that they are Maoists and commit atrocities when people don't support them," I said. "The SADF supported them during the war years, but I never liked or trusted them. You can bet, though, that they won't take kindly to us being there—even if we were their one-time sponsors and supposed allies."

"They'll probably skin your arses if they catch you," Buckingham said encouragingly.

"Then we'll just have to do some skinning of our own," I answered, "I don't think that'll be too much of a problem. If I understand you correctly, the FAA will hold an outer perimeter and my men will be there purely to protect the recovery teams. To be absolutely clear, you are looking for a protection team that comprises men who can fight if push comes to shove."

"Precisely. If the shit hits the fan we won't be able to baby-sit a group of security guys. We'll be too busy trying to save our own skins," he laughed.

I was starting to warm to Buckingham. He was asking us to help him recover his equipment while at the same time making it clear that the project would probably be dangerous. There was, for instance, no guarantee that UNITA would not try to retake Soyo if the FAA was successful in capturing it in the first place.

"What is the strategic or tactical value of Soyo to UNITA?" I asked.

"Absolutely none—or at best, very little that I am aware of. It just happens that we have our kit on the Soyo docks. Other than that, it can serve them no purpose at all. UNITA doesn't have a navy or even own a ship."

"If I agree to get involved, what will you expect from me and my company?"

"It will be your job to put together a team and see to their logistics, salaries, rations, uniforms and so forth. I'll coordinate with the Angolan oil parastatal Sonangol as regards the allocation of their tasks on the ground."

"What sort of time frame are we looking at and what are the budgetary constraints? You obviously know that recruiting good men to conduct a security operation in a hazardous area costs money?"

"Obviously. I would like the equipment recovered as soon as possible. As far as the budget is concerned, tell me how you'll do it and how much it will cost. Provided it's within reason, I'll get the money for you."

"Okay," I said. "Will you personally be placing the contract on us?"

"Yes and no. The contract will be between you and Sonangol. In turn, we'll liaise between you and them. Heritage Oil is a foreign company and that precludes it from contracting you to provide this kind of service directly. We must have the sanction of the Angolan government and that can only be obtained by Sonangol."

"Okay, but who'll pay for our services? What guarantees do I have that we'll even be paid? I don't want to hire guys and then have them sitting on my tail because I don't have the money to pay them. I've been down that road before."

"I'll personally guarantee the funds and ensure that you are paid in advance."

I told Buckingham that I needed time to plan the operation. To ensure that my appreciation of the situation would be correct and to plan correctly, I needed intelligence that neither Buckingham nor Mann could provide. This meant I would have to rely on a plan based on little or no intelligence. I told them that I would recruit ex-SADF soldiers who had seen active service. I knew I could depend on them when the chips were down.

President de Klerk's destruction of what had arguably been one of the best unconventional fighting forces in the world meant there were many highly trained and competent ex-soldiers looking for work. I preferred having men like these by my side as a security team, no matter where we might find ourselves.

"I will choose the team myself. I'll let you know what equipment I will require and what the costs will be," I told them.

Initially Buckingham and Mann wanted the team under the command and control of a British manager. I disagreed and told them no British manager, regardless of his background, knew about war in Africa as we did. The majority of ex-SADF soldiers would have refused to serve under one anyway—myself included.

It was either to be a South African-staffed and controlled contract or nothing.

Buckingham finally relented and we agreed that I would plan the operation, brief him, and recruit the men. Then, assuming the budget was approved, the money would be paid in advance and we would, in turn, support the Heritage Oil recovery operation in Angola.

Buckingham gave me two weeks to come up with a workable plan. He told me to contract the men for a one-month period—that was how long Heritage Oil's planners anticipated it would take to recover their equipment.

I told Larney Keller that although Executive Outcomes would run and control the operation, I would ensure he got the same share of profit as I did since he had introduced me to Buckingham and Mann. He accepted my offer and immediately volunteered to go to Soyo with the team and help out where he could.

"After all, I outranked you in the army," he said with a smile.

"I have no problem with you going to Soyo. But someone has to stay here to take care of logistics and sort out any operational or administrative problems that crop up." I began my appreciation of the situation and the planning to accomplish the mission. In a few days (considering the brevity of the intelligence I was able to lay my hands on) I came up with what I considered to be a workable plan to protect Buckingham's recovery teams. Major aspects crucial to the success of the operation were:

- It was vital that the Angolan Army (FAA) conduct their offensive operation to secure and hold Soyo and its harbour—only then would EO commit its men. As there was a real danger of UNITA harassing my men, I required them to be armed with pistols at least, but preferably with rifles. Buckingham would have to arrange the weapons.
- I needed 50 men with combat experience as it was possible they would come under fire from UNITA. They had to be men who knew their way around guns and who would be capable of holding the line no matter what was thrown at them.
- The contingent would be split into two 25-man teams to provide 24-hour protection for the recovery teams.
- The group would need VHF and HF radios to ensure constant communications among themselves and back to me in Pretoria. They would also need a direct link with the Angolan military so that they would be able to coordinate movements and avoid being targeted by FAA.
- We needed three satellite phones to ensure a stable communications link between Soyo and Pretoria, and a secure link between my office in Pretoria and London.
- We would need to provide refresher courses for the men going to Angola (aspects like emergency medical treatment, requests for supplies, and signals procedures).
- We required a medevac capability to deal with malaria, and gunshot wounds and other injuries.
- The men needed clothing, sleeping bags, boots, and a variety of other personal equipment.
- I would set up a supply line to ensure they got regular supplies of fresh food.

I drafted a document that eventually became Executive Outcomes' mission statement and guidelines. It clearly spelt out that the company would work only with legitimate UN-sanctioned governments and legitimate business enterprises. All members of the company would strictly follow these guidelines and anyone found contravening them would be

summarily dismissed or put on trial in the country they were operating in. This draft was later expanded and is contained in Appendix A.

Two weeks later I was ready to brief Buckingham. He happened to be in Namibia on business and a few days later he flew to Johannesburg where I briefed him and laid out my plan along with the costs involved.

"Looks great to me," he said. "Is there anything you are concerned about?"

"Yes, if my men are going into a danger zone—which Angola is at the moment— they will need weapons. I suspect UNITA will try to chase us off the harbour to stop the recovery operation. Why would they allow it to go ahead when the oil taxes will benefit the Angolan government? I don't want my men to become targets for UNITA to practise on. Also, I can't just walk into a gun shop over here and buy assault rifles and machine guns."

"Good point," said Buckingham, "I will have to clear that with the Angolan military via Sonangol. You obviously can't fly into Angola carrying guns. You will need their permission and assistance on that matter. I will find out if the Angolans can provide weapons and let you know. In the meantime, I would like you to consider this a 'Go!'—start getting your team together."

"I'll put the word out that I am looking for some good men. In the meantime, I'll need money to start the ball rolling. I expect it will cost approximately US$225 000 give or take a few dollars and depending on what happens on the ground. I must warn you that the price may increase if there are drastic changes to the situation. If it's okay with you, please transfer about US$50 000 into my account for a start."

Before I could commence the recruitment and preparation for the operation I had a training programme to present to Special Forces, so I told Buckingham I would only be able to begin laying the foundation for the operation in about three weeks.

"Okay, but remember, this is bloody urgent. I'm bleeding money in the meantime," he said as we sealed the agreement with a handshake and parted company.

Presenting the training course for Special Forces was not easy because I had a lot on my mind. The Heritage Oil recovery operation began to plague me day and night. I ran hundreds of scenarios through my head and realised that the leadership element would be crucial to the success of the operation. The men I recruited would also have to be of a high calibre. I phoned Harry Ferreira, an old friend from 32 Battalion, and asked if he still had contact with any of our old comrades. Since joining the CCB in 1989 I had broken all contact with my old 32 Battalion friends."Why?" he asked jokingly. "Are you planning to invade an African country—and is there place for me?"

"No, I have a security job in Angola."

"Sounds good. I'll talk to some of the old guys. How many men will you need?"

We agreed to meet a few days later so that I could provide details of the operation and tell him exactly what I needed in terms of manpower.

'That solves my biggest problem,' I thought. Time would prove me very wrong.

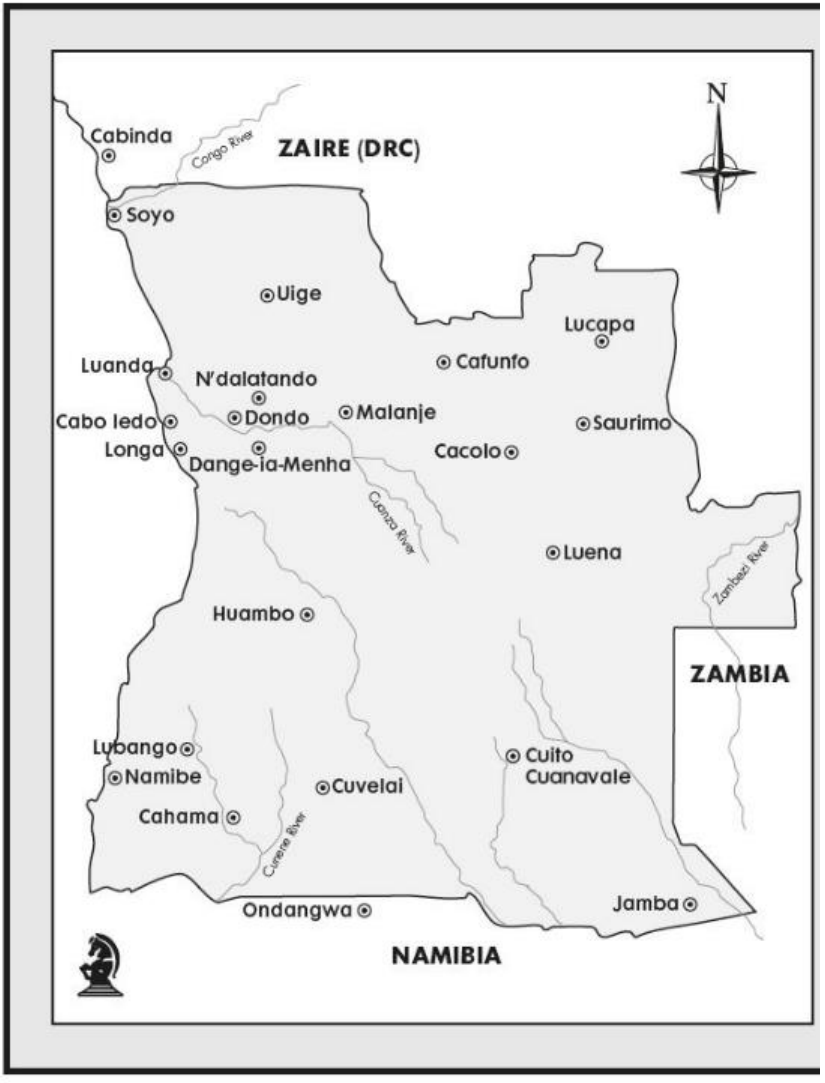
Harry Ferreira, a friend from 32 Bn played an important role in the Soyo contract (Photo LinkedIn)

General Joep Joubert tried to intervene in the trumped-up charges against Nico Palm (Photo Unknown)

06:
Angola: Torn Apart by War

Angola is a vast country that covers approximately 1.3 million square kilometres. It is bordered by the South Atlantic to the west, the Democratic Republic of the Congo[113] to the north, Namibia to the south, and Zambia to the east. By early 1993, it had known little peace since the beginning of its struggle for independence from Portugal in 1961.

When Portugal finally abandoned Angola in 1975, it left it to resolve its own problems —or to implode and destroy itself in the attempt. Conflict escalated steadily, and the SADF's intervention did little to restore peace in the region.[114]



Map of Angola

Angola was a country that many of us who served in the SADF knew well as we had been called on to fight the Angolan Army and SWAPO's PLAN, who had used that country as a springboard from which to launch its operations into South West Africa/Namibia during South Africa's long and bloody border war.

After Cuban forces intervened in 1975/1976, the Angolan rebel movement UNITA under Dr Jonas Savimbi—aided by massive financial and moral support from the US as well as increasing financial and military help from South Africa—was able to regroup and wage a long-running and devastating civil war against the MPLA government. Both the civilian population and the infrastructure suffered massive collateral damage.

With the support of units like 32 Battalion, 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, Special Forces, 1 Parachute Battalion and others, large-scale mechanised SADF incursions supported by clandestine actions into southern Angola, were able to capture and hold large areas of the country. Operating primarily against PLAN, South African forces also engaged FAPLA in numerous battles in southern Angola. Within SWA/Namibia, the SADF's 101 Battalion and the South African Police's counter-insurgency unit 'Koevoet'[115] engaged PLAN cadres infiltrating from Angola with great success.

In late 1983 the UN Security Council demanded that South Africa withdraw its forces from Angola. Shortly afterwards Angola and South Africa signed the Lusaka Accords in which South Africa demanded that the MPLA cease all support for SWAPO and PLAN[116] in exchange for the withdrawal of its troops from Angolan soil. Ironically South Africa was supporting UNITA, which on occasion had also given aid and support to SWAPO and PLAN.

Despite the Lusaka Accords, South Africa's Military Intelligence still actively supported UNITA through its Directorate of Special Tasks (DST).

DST comprised two divisions—DST1 which provided training and covert support to the Mozambique resistance movement (RENAMO) and DST2 which did the same for UNITA.

A DST (MI) member at a UNITA base, Southern Angola (photo: unknown)

Financial support for UNITA was provided through Project Spyker[117]—later renamed Project Silver, a highly secretive project financed by the Special Defence Budget (by implication, South African taxpayers) and controlled in its entirety by DST2. UNITA was thus a true foreign proxy force assisted and supported by both the US and South Africa, despite its ideological leaning.

In 1985 MPLA's armed forces (FAPLA) launched a massive offensive against UNITA with the support of some 50 000 Cuban troops. With UNITA reeling under this new onslaught, the SADF intervened to save its Maoist proxy force, and sent large numbers of South African troops (supported by armour, artillery, and air force assets) across the South West African border into Angola in an attempt to save Savimbi's organisation and deal a devastating blow to the joint FAPLA/Cuban alliance.

US covert assistance to UNITA had been banned by the US Congress through the Clark Amendment in 1976, but was resumed after the amendment was repealed in 1985.

Between 1986 and 1991 US covert aid to UNITA totalled approximately US$250 million. This made it the second biggest American covert programme ever (exceeded only by aid to the Mujahedeen, aimed at driving Soviet forces out of Afghanistan). Ironically, the US would find itself fighting its erstwhile allies in Afghanistan decades later.

South African assistance to UNITA was more overt as its forces engaged in a series of major battles in southeastern Angola during 1987 and 1988. By 16 January 1988, FAPLA had failed to capture UNITA's stronghold at Mavinga, and shortly after that it suffered another crushing defeat at the hands of the SADF on the Lomba River. The many battles and manoeuvres in Angola ultimately culminated in the SADF and UNITA's siege of Cuito Cuanavale.[118]

In South Africa, several new units were mobilised and sent to the front to break

through Cuban/FAPLA defences and numerous major battles were fought. When the siege developed into what was considered to be a stalemate, the SADF's high command changed its strategy, deciding that the war against FAPLA and its Cuban allies couldn't be won in a hurry. According to the Cubans, the stalemate encouraged them and their FAPLA allies to attempt a break-out and they conducted a successful flanking manoeuvre south-west of Cuito Cuanavale, progressively forcing SADF units back into SWA/Namibia. Within a relatively short space of time the Cubans claimed that they had established a 400 kilometre front that extended as close as twenty kilometres from the SWA/Namibian border.

General Jannie Geldenhuys, ex-Chief of the SADF, painted a different picture:

Cuba needed a victory so that they could pull out of Africa with some honour. The Cuban/MPLA forces had set out on a mission to capture Jamba, Savimbi's stronghold. This new offensive didn't reach anywhere near Jamba. They never even came close to Mavinga. They continually tried to cross the Lomba River at the same place and suffered disastrous defeats at every attempt. Under increasing pressure on the battlefield, the MPLA alliance retreated westwards from where they had started their offensive.

The last major battles took place at Tumpo, a minefield located on the eastern side of Cuito Cuanavale.

This was, in my opinion, a turning point in the war.

It was then that Fidel Castro pulled off what I considered to be a strategic hoax. Despite suffering horrendous casualties, he propagated that the situation at Cuito Cuanavale had indeed been a Cuban victory.[119]

Castro would later claim that his 'allies' (the Soviets and the MPLA) had indeed lost the war in southeastern Angola and that his internationally claimed victory at Cuito Cuanavale had been a ruse. It had, however, immediately forced international attention away from the mess, and focussed attention towards the south west of Angola.[120]

Although the South African government heralded the end of the siege as a decisive military victory, the reality, in the strictest of military terms, was that while it was a tactical and operational victory, it was viewed as a strategic defeat, thanks to Castro's exploitation of the media.

Worn down by the effects of continued and escalating UN sanctions and the internationally encouraged disinvestment programme, South Africa's economy was suffering.

Many young South African soldiers had been killed in action and the war was costing the country at least US$2 million per day. Not surprisingly, the conflict had become increasingly unpopular within South Africa.

A series of diplomatic initiatives were launched in an attempt to end the devastating war. In 1988, a cash-strapped Soviet Union beset with its own growing internal problems, told the government of Angola's President Dos Santos that it was no longer prepared to provide weapons and assistance to FAPLA. Similarly, the Soviet Union could no longer continue to support the Cuban military efforts in Angola. South Africa, too, was war weary.

South Africa's resolve to continue the war in SWA/Namibia and Angola began to weaken rapidly. Cuito Cuanavale was, in reality, the major factor that forced South Africa and the Cuban/MPLA alliance to open serious negotiations aimed at bringing about the implementation of the UN Security Council's Resolution 435.

Tabled ten years before on 29 September 1978, the resolution was aimed at what was referred to as the 'Namibian Problem' and provided for the following:

Adopted by the Security Council on September 29 1978.

The Security Council, reaffirming the legal responsibility of the United Nations over Namibia:

1. Approves the report of the Secretary-General of the council for the implementation of the proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation, and his explanatory statement:
2. Reiterates that its objective is the withdrawal of South Africa's illegal administration of Namibia and the transfer of power to the people of Namibia with the assistance of

the United Nations in accordance with resolution 385 of 1976.

3. Decides to establish under its authority, a United Nations Transition Group (UNTAG) in accordance with the report of the Secretary-General for a period of up to twelve months in order to assist his Special Representative to carry out the mandate conferred upon him by paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 431 (1978), namely to ensure the early independence of Namibia through free and fair elections under supervision and control of the United Nations.
4. Welcomes SWAPO's preparedness to cooperate in the implementation of the Secretary-General's report, including its expressed readiness to sign and observe the cease-fire provisions as manifested in the letter from the President of SWAPO dated September 6 1978.
5. Calls on South Africa forthwith to cooperate with the Secretary-General in the implementation of this resolution.
6. Declares that all unilateral measures taken by the illegal administration in Namibia in relation to the electoral process, including unilateral register of voters, or transfer of power, in contravention of Security Council resolutions 385 (1976), 431 (1976) and this resolution are null and void.
7. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council not later than October 23 1978 on the implementation of this resolution.

The South African government agreed to cooperate in achieving the implementation of Resolution 435, but withdrew its agreement when SWAPO demanded (and the Secretary-General of the UN Security Council granted) assembly points in 'liberated' areas in Namibia when there were none.

This farce delayed the implementation of Resolution 435 for ten years.

In December 1987, in defiance of the UN, the South African government unilaterally held elections in Namibia. These were boycotted by SWAPO and a few other political parties, and South Africa continued to administer Namibia through its installed multiracial coalitions. Negotiations after 1978 focussed on issues such as supervision of elections connected with the implementation of the UN plan. The apparent rejection of Resolution 435 also led to an escalation in PLAN's armed activities.

During 1998 there were various meetings between South African, Angolan, and Cuban officials at which attempts were made to settle the so-called Angolan question and to implement Resolution 435 in Namibia. Then-Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan's apparently arrogant and uncompromising attitude almost derailed the negotiations during the second round of talks in Cairo on the 24–25 June. At the third meeting in New York, in July 1988, an agreement was reached that culminated in a document titled 'Principles for a Peaceful Settlement in South West Africa, Angola, Cuba, and South Africa'. At this meeting, with the United States acting as mediator, South Africa, Angola, and Cuba ratified the agreement on 13 July.

The agreement read as follows:

The governments of the People's Republic of Angola, the Republic of Cuba, and the Republic of South Africa, reached agreement on a series of essential principles to lay the foundation for peace in south-western Africa. They all recognise that each of these principles is indispensable for a global agreement.

1. Implementation of Resolution 435/78 of the United Nations Security Council. The parties should indicate and recommend to the United Nations Secretary-General a date for the start of the implementation of Security Council Resolution 435/78.
2. The governments of the People's Republic of Angola and the Republic of South Africa should, in keeping with the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435/78, cooperate with the Secretary-General in order to ensure the independence of Namibia through free and just elections, abstaining from any measure which could block implementation of that resolution.
3. The movement to the north, and staged and total withdrawal, of Cuban troops from the territory of the People's Republic of Angola on the basis of a PRACuban agreement and the decision of both states to request on-the-spot verification of this withdrawal by the UN Security Council.
4. Respect for the sovereignty, sovereign equality, and independence of states and for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders.
5. Non-interference in the internal affairs of states.
6. Abstention from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and independence of states.
7. Acceptance of the responsibility of states not to allow their territory to be used for acts of war, aggression, or violence against other states.
8. Reaffirmation of the right of the peoples in the south-western region of Africa to self-determination, independence, and equal rights.
9. Verification and monitoring of compliance with the obligations resulting from agreements that may be entered into.
10. Undertaking to comply in good faith with obligations assumed under agreements that may be entered into and to resolve differences through negotiations.
11. Recognition of the role of the permanent members of the Security Council as guarantors of the implementation of agreements that may be entered into.
12. Right of each state to peace, development, and social progress.
13. African and international cooperation to solve development problems in the south-western region of Africa.
14. Recognition of the mediating role of the United States.

The three countries held their final meeting in Geneva between 2 and 5 August 1988.

On 8 August, South Africa voluntarily committed itself to a de facto cessation of hostilities, and by 30 August the SADF had completed its withdrawal from Angola.

On 13 December 1988 South Africa, Angola, and Cuba signed the Brazzaville Protocol, which recommended that the UN Secretary-General set 1 April 1989 as the deadline for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435.

The protocol also established a Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC). By 20 December, the Security Council had set up the UN's Angolan Verification Mission (UNAVEM) in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 626.

On 22 December 1988 South Africa, Angola, and Cuba signed the New York Treaty—also known as the Tripartite Agreement—at the UN Headquarters. This finalised the agreements reached in Geneva.

Angola and Cuba also signed a bilateral agreement on the Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. This paved the way for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 on 1 April 1989. The parties agreed that the Joint Monitoring Commission would monitor and oversee the implementation of agreements.

In January 1989, the MPLA's Dos Santos and UNITA's Savimbi agreed to meet and bring about an end to the war that was tearing their country apart. They finally met in Gbadolite, Zaire[121] in June 1989, and peace was brokered with the assistance of eighteen African nations. Dos Santos and Savimbi sealed this agreement with a handshake, but it soon collapsed over a disagreement about what their oral undertakings had been and over Savimbi's future role in the country.

A FAPLA BMP-2 shot out by UNITA in Southern Angola (photo: Jim Hooper)

Some of the fiercest fighting of the Angolan war followed and during the next eighteen months FAPLA and UNITA did battle throughout Angola in attempts to achieve a military victory. Military and civilian casualties escalated rapidly and there seemed to be no end to the war in sight.

There were six rounds of peace talks between UNITA and the Angolan government between April 1990 and May 1991. The talks were hosted by Portugal and there were observers from the United States and the Soviet Union present—these were subsequently known as the Observing Troika.

In May 1991 the talks resulted in an agreement known as the Bicesse Accords. This put a temporary end to a conflict that had already killed between 100 000 and 350 000 people. The agreement only became possible because the end of the Cold War facilitated US-Soviet cooperation, and because the Soviet Union and Cuba needed to rein in their financial commitments to Angola.

The accords ratified a cease-fire and called for government and UNITA forces to be integrated into a 50 000-strong unified Angolan Armed Forces (FAPLA was renamed FAA). The accords contained a so-called 'Triple Zero clause' which prohibited either side from purchasing new supplies of weaponry. In terms of the agreements the MPLA remained the legitimate and internationally recognised government, retaining responsibility for running the state during the interim period and for setting the date for elections.

A UN-Angolan Verification Mission (UNAVEM) team of 576 people was made responsible for monitoring the situation during this interim period.

Angola's first nationwide elections were held on the last two days of September 1992. This gave Angolans their first opportunity to express their will in what the UN and other foreign observers concluded was a generally free and fair process.

With a turnout of more than 91% (4.4 million) of registered voters, the MPLA candidate, President dos Santos got 49.6% of the vote against Savimbi's 40.7%. In the election for the legislature, MPLA won 54% of the vote against UNITA's 34%.

Under Angolan law, if the winner of the presidential election failed to get more than 50% of the votes cast, an election runoff was required. This runoff was never held because UNITA rejected the results.

Jonas Savimbi remobilised his forces across the country and returned the country to civil war.

It was to this war-torn country that Tony Buckingham wanted me to take my men to protect his recovery teams.

I agreed.

A UNITA rebel runs for cover during a fire-fight with FAPLA (photo: Jim Hooper)

07:
A Little Town Called Soyo

Before I set the wheels in motion to recruit men for the pending task in Soyo, I visited the Wierda Bridge Police Station in Pretoria to determine the legitimacy of my imminent contract with Buckingham.

I cannot recall the name of the police officer I spoke to but he assured me that, according to South African law, I would certainly not be doing anything illegal. He went on to state that if we were fired on by hostile forces—and returned fire—we would be acting within the law and in self-defence. According to him, it would, however, be up to the country in which the shooting had taken place to determine whether we had broken any laws. He also pointed out that several private security companies in South Africa were already putting their men in military-style uniforms and arming them with assault rifles as they faced the same types of problems I was anticipating in Angola.

I met with Harry Ferreira and told him I would be providing security for an oil company's equipment-recovery team in Soyo.

"Where the hell is Soyo?" he asked.

"It's a little harbour town in the north-west of Angola just south of the Cabinda enclave. It apparently has no value from a military point of view, but it is strategically located for the oil industry and has some on-shore facilities. The area produces about 500 000 barrels of oil a day. UNITA overran it several months ago and that has caused my clients some headaches because a lot of their equipment is stored there. The company is in a 'catch-22' situation—they need to access their equipment but UNITA won't allow them into the area. What's more, the Angolan government is pressuring them for oil taxes because it needs revenue to finance the war against UNITA."

"Is Soyo still under UNITA control?" Harry wanted to know.

"Apparently so, but I've been assured that the Angolan Army is planning to attack and recapture the town. Once they have achieved their objectives, we'll move in and baby-sit my client's recovery teams."

"Do you think we'll get involved in a punch-up with UNITA?" Harry asked.

"I hope not, but I have to plan for the worst-case scenario. The guys we take with us must be willing to fight. We can't tell our client that we'll provide security and then refuse to protect them against UNITA if their troops attack us."

"Okay, as long as we know we might have to defend ourselves as well...that's fair enough. Who is your client, by the way?"

"I suppose it's actually the Angolan oil parastatal, Sonangol, but we will be interfacing with them through a UK-based oil company by the name of Heritage Oil & Gas. This operation is probably going to be somewhat tricky, so I want us to treat the entire task as a classified project. I don't want UNITA thinking we're planning to invade and attack them."

"I agree it should be kept as quiet as possible," said Harry, "I suppose I had better get moving and identify some men."

Several days later, Buckingham's first funds arrived.

He sent me the princely sum of US$75 000 instead of the US$50 000 I had asked for. This was an enormous amount of money to me and I was rather excited about the sudden growth in my small company's account. My bank manager was equally impressed.

During the days that followed, I met and interviewed several small groups of men and appointed those who I deemed suitable to positions within the group. Harry had wisely decided he didn't want to compromise the pending operation by making things too public, so he set up meetings all over Pretoria.

I appointed Major Buks Buys (formerly of the Special Forces' 5 Reconnaissance Regiment) as the team's ground commander. I had not met Buks during the shooting war but we had met several years later while we were both working for Directorate Covert Collection. He took pains to convince me that he was well suited for the task and I took him at his word.

I gave the other applicants just enough information to enable them to decide whether or not to join my company. I started by telling them who the client was, who they would be answerable to, and what the mission was.

Then I explained that they would be expected to provide a total security service to Heritage Oil's recovery teams who would be unable and possibly even unwilling to defend themselves and their equipment from any attack by an aggressor force.

I made sure they understood that the task was going to be dangerous and explained that if UNITA decided to interfere with the operation, it would be our job to ensure the safety of the recovery teams using whatever means were at our disposal.

I didn't expect men to go to Soyo to die for the Angolan government, but I did expect everyone to give a good account of themselves if we came under fire from UNITA—or from the Angolan army, for that matter. Any team operating in a high- risk combat zone is only as strong as its weakest member, and I didn't want any cowards on board. They would be away from home for about a month, which would be the duration of their contract.

To some of the men, the prospect of having to return fire at UNITA if the need arose was more than they were prepared to contemplate. For many years the South African public and soldiers alike had been led to believe that UNITA was a Christian liberation movement fighting to overthrow Angola's communist government. This idea had been extensively propagated by the South African media, and as a result, it had become a fact in the collective South African mind. No one ever mentioned that Dr Jonas Savimbi was actually a Maoist posing as a Christian for convenience.

As far as UNITA was concerned, the South African government had learnt that the more often a lie is repeated, the more likely it is to be believed.

Dr Jonas Savimbi, UNITA's charismatic Maoist leader (photo: unknown)

Some of the men considered my contract to be a betrayal of Christian values and bluntly refused to go to Angola. Others asked how I could justify going up against UNITA when they had been our allies during the war.

"Did you ever fight alongside UNITA? Did UNITA ever save your arses? Did UNITA ever pay you a single cent?" I asked one such group.

None of them responded to my question.

The irony of such naive comments was that many of those who felt strongly about UNITA had never worked with or even seen them during SADF's operations in Angola, and they had unwittingly helped to further propagate the National Party's desire to ensure Angola's continued instability.

"The war in Angola is over," I told them. "Angola held a United Nations-supervised election in 1992. The MPLA won that election and is internationally recognised as the legitimate, democratically elected government of Angola. We will therefore be going into Soyo with the full sanction of the UN-approved Angolan government. The Angolan Army will assault and hold Soyo, thereby providing us with a protective outer perimeter.

"I'm not asking you to go in and fight UNITA. However, if UNITA fires at you, I expect you to return fire with a vengeance. We are to provide security for a recovery team—that's it. I am classifying this task as 'secret' in order to get this done as quickly, quietly, and safely as possible."

"You want to use us as mercenaries," someone said.

"I disagree. When a security guard fires at an armed criminal, do you classify him as a mercenary? If a plumber is working in a hostile area and defends himself from attacks, is he a mercenary?" I asked.

No one had an answer to that.

"Besides," I added, "the South African police have confirmed that there is nothing illegal about what we intend doing."

Unbeknown to me, one of the men secretly tape-recorded one of the meetings and passed the recording to either a journalist or MI. The next thing we knew, newspaper headlines were boldly telling the South African public that Executive Outcomes planned to invade Angola and attack UNITA.

Speculations ranged from us mounting a secret mission to assassinate Dr Jonas Savimbi, to grabbing the Angolan diamond fields for ourselves. In the years that followed, this kind of false and reckless reporting would become even more vociferous.

On 28 February 1993, Rapport ran an article with the (directly translated) headline, 'SA Fighters in Angola' in which the first names of our men were revealed. It didn't name myself or EO, but it was abundantly clear who they were referring to. The article was jointly written by Karin Brynard and ZB du Toit.

On reading it, it became painfully obvious to me that they could not have written their story without input from someone I had interviewed—or from an intelligence agency.

Amongst other things, it alleged that the MPLA had recruited us to fight UNITA; that some of my men had been detained and questioned by the South African Police; and that the men had been recruited to provide training for security officials who would be protecting MPLA buildings and installations. These lies were snatched up and expanded upon by others.

Rusty Evans, the Director General of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs, said the case of assistance being given to Angola's MPLA should be investigated 'to the bone'. Oddly enough, he said nothing about South African companies (like the Armscor parastatal) and the SADF's DST that were known to be supporting UNITA with weapons, and training, despite the peace agreements and in direct contravention of UN Security Council resolutions.

We had now been branded mercenaries. Ironically, other security companies that used armed personnel to execute duties beyond South Africa's borders were not so regarded.

A Sunday Times article published on 28 February 1993 (written by Edyth Bulbring) had an even more dramatic headline, 'CCB men now fight UNITA'.

I was named as the man handling the payment for the contract. The Sunday Times, too, had been fed false information: Bulbring's article implied that everyone working for Executive Outcomes had previously been involved in the CCB. She went on to state: '[in addition to capturing Soyo in preparation] for the offensive against Jamba[122] the MPLA is looking for 25 commanders and five instructors to be paid US$5 000 a month for a three-month contract'. Bulbring's lies were presented as fact, not speculation. She seemed to have a very cosy relationship with MI.

It appeared to me that there were several other journalists at both the Rapport and the Sunday Times who enjoyed a similar cosy relationship, either with a government intelligence agency or a commercial enterprise that wanted to prevent us from going into Angola, and to Soyo in particular.

The main purpose of these articles seemed to be twofold: to create the perception that Executive Outcomes was acting in a criminal manner; and to provide early warning to UNITA that an action had been planned in the Soyo area.

I was furious.

The disinformation had clearly been designed to mislead the South African public as well as the international community. More importantly to me, the articles compromised our entire operation and placed my men in direct danger of being attacked by UNITA.

I concluded that we now had no option other than to adopt an 'aggressive' rather than a 'passive' security policy. Both Larney and Harry agreed with me. Regardless of the true situation, everyone working for EO would now be facing imminent danger in Angola.

A serving friend in Special Forces told me that we were in the process of creating 'a massive problem' as certain arms deals with UNITA were in the process of being finalised, and went on to say that the arms were required for a pending attempt to overthrow the MPLA government. He also advised me that there were plans afoot to shut down Executive Outcomes if I went ahead with the contract in Angola. His warning merely confirmed what I already suspected: South Africa was still covertly assisting and supporting UNITA.

I put this to a Pretoria-based journalist who was attempting to interrogate me on our contract, but he merely dismissed it as unimportant. His main focus was our supposed 'criminal actions'.

A few days later Die Burger published an article with the headline, 'UNITA receives no weaponry from SA—Louw [the then Minister of Defence, Gene Louw]' in which Louw categorically rejected rumours that South African military equipment was being gifted to UNITA. The article went on to say:

> The law on armaments development and manufacturing states that no armaments may be exported from South Africa without a marketing and export permit issued by Armscor.
>
> Mr Louw said that anyone who acts in contravention of this law and exports military equipment without the required permits is guilty of an offence which is punishable with a fine of R10 000 or ten years' imprisonment.

Louw implied that he intended to personally ensure that the regulations were adhered to.

That was indeed laughable to those who had assisted South Africa to procure arms during the UN arms embargo and who knew only too well how easy it was to get permits to buy or sell weapons. It was interesting to see how quickly my discussion with that Pretoria journalist had made its way to Cape Town, and a matter for conjecture why Louw would have issued such a statement—especially since my comment had been the first about clandestine military aid to UNITA.

Louw also conveniently overlooked the R18 million arms deal that South Africa had concluded with volatile Rwanda in total defiance of a UN arms embargo. The following year would witness the start of the Hutu on Tutsi genocide, the brutality and extent of which would shake the world.

The Weekly Mail ran a story titled, 'Millions in SA arms fuel bitter civil war' on 5 March 1993. Paul Stober and Eddie Koch wrote a follow-up article in which more revelations on the South Africa-Rwandan contract concluded by Armscor's privatised company, Denel, were made public. This was denied by both Armscor and the SA government.

It struck me as strange that this transaction had been regarded as a minor issue while Executive Outcomes' contract to protect civilians recovering drilling machinery had become a major concern to South Africa. Could it have been that Rwanda didn't possess the diamonds, oil, ivory, and precious hardwood, that Angola did?

On 7 March 1993 the Sunday Times ran an article by Charmaine Naidoo titled, 'Radar cover raises smuggling concern'. This was clearly intended to provide reasons why no action could be taken vis-a-vis illegal weapons shipments to UNITA. A Foreign Affairs source was quoted as saying, 'It is nearly impossible to provide radar cover across the length of the border.' This starkly contrasted the repeated assurances given to the South African public about our airspace having been under continual radar control during South Africa's war in Angola and clandestine and covert operations against other neighbouring states. I wondered who was lying and why.

After hearing about the negative media campaign that had been unleashed in South Africa, Buckingham called me from London and asked me what I thought. My suspicion was that it was intended to discourage us from going to Angola while at the same time, warning UNITA of our pending arrival.

"I think we should just go ahead with the operation. UNITA has now been warned that something is about to happen at Soyo, so my only concern is that their units there will have been reinforced. This will put my men and your recovery teams in grave danger, so the sooner we get the job done the better," I responded.

"I'll discuss this with the chairman of Sonangol, Joaquim David. Things are going in a direction we didn't foresee," said Buckingham. "Are you sure you want to continue?"

"Bloody right we will. The only possible problem we'll now have is that some of my men will be reluctant to go since the perception has been created that we intend to invade the country. You now need to ensure that either Sonangol or the Angolan Army provide my men with firearms other than pistols. If UNITA want a fight, then we should at least be given the opportunity to defend ourselves adequately. By the way, will we need visas to enter Angola?"

"I'll ask Joaquim about that one too and see what we can arrange," he promised me.

The newspaper articles had indeed scared off a number of the men who had tentatively agreed to Executive Outcomes's little excursion. Between Harry, Larney, and myself we could only count 30 who still wanted to go—far fewer than the media speculated—and some of them were highly dubious characters to boot. Initially, when I had believed it was going to be a relatively easy security operation, I hadn't been too concerned about the odd strange character being employed. They would make up numbers and the more experienced men could help them out where needed. The situation had now started changing rather rapidly.

Buckingham called me a day later and reassured me that, according to Sonangol's continued liaison with FAA, there was still little or no UNITA presence in the Soyo area. Sonangol had also arranged for our men to be able to enter Angola without visas so long as they had valid passports. This was a relief to me as obtaining visas could be a costly and lengthy process.

Meanwhile, the false reports that kept appearing in the media set off even louder alarm bells in the offices of Military Intelligence and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Before long, the first shots were fired in what probably became the longest propaganda war ever waged against a legitimate private company under contract to another legitimate company, working with the blessing of a legitimate host government.

A decade later, South Africans working in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere— doing what we did in Angola—would be of little to no concern to the media, MI, or even the DFA.

The media began to act like lions circling wounded prey. Self-proclaimed experts on Executive Outcomes surfaced and began offering their two cents' worth regarding the legality or otherwise of our contract. It seemed they knew more about criminal law than the South African Police. These same 'experts' commented on what they considered to be our mission, and despite being totally off the mark, their comments were held in high regard and regurgitated by others until eventually they were accepted as truth.

My concern deepened with every media report. I now had no doubt that the lies being generated by the media were finding their way to UNITA. Savimbi's forces would not allow my men to enter Soyo unopposed and would use everything in their power—and arsenal—to get rid of us. It was becoming clear that we would have a fight on our hands when we got to Soyo.

Although I didn't personally have a gripe with UNITA, the strong support that a 'Christian' South Africa offered a dedicated Maoist like Dr Jonas Savimbi had always amazed me. I didn't have a problem with Maoism, I had a problem with hypocrisy. I also felt certain that Project Spyker/Silver was still operating in secret and that the SADF was still providing UNITA with millions of Rands worth of covert military support at the South African taxpayer's expense.

Initial media reports described us as a lot of 'has-beens'—washed-out, ageing soldiers who posed no significant threat to anyone—least of all to UNITA. Others proclaimed that I was knowingly sending men to their deaths in Angola. This soon changed dramatically and we suddenly became 'mercenaries' and 'racist dogs of war'. It was clear to me that someone was orchestrating the stories being fed to the media and that they, in turn, were merrily acting as a mouthpiece for both their masters and UNITA.

Knowing how the South African public had for years been duped about UNITA's aims and intentions, I suspected that the source or sources of information were South African, and not Angolan. The media had taken it upon themselves to act as UNITA's early-warning system.

Unperturbed, the men went off to buy their equipment at the local Trapper's Trading store in Pretoria and to book their flights to Windhoek in Namibia or Luanda in Angola.

Every man was given a budgeted sum with which to purchase the equipment set down on a requirement list.

As the media war intensified, I became convinced that someone in South Africa was afraid we would discover or disrupt some illegal business arrangement between parties in South Africa and UNITA. This assumption would later prove to be correct.

South Africa was a signatory to the international arms embargo on UNITA and it claimed to uphold the relevant UN Security Council resolution. Reports, however, indicated that shipments of arms and ammunition were being flown to known UNITA strongholds in southern, central, and northern Angola. Equipment was also being airlifted to UNITA via Zaire (now DRC). The Sunday Times report of 7 March—about the sparsity of radar coverage—could be used to explain why such flights were supposedly never intercepted by the South African authorities. Several of these flights were directed from a private airfield north of Pretoria.

On 10 March 1993, the Afrikaans daily, Beeld, wittingly or unwittingly published a poorly formulated lie that was once again aimed directly at misinforming the public. The headline, directly translated, read, '100 SA fighters stand ready to murder Savimbi'. It was written by an anonymous correspondent who claimed we

Mnr. Jonas Savimbi

021

100 SA vegters staan reg om Savimbi te moor

Korrespondent

KAAPSTAD. – 'n Groot groep goed opgeleide en deurwinterde Suid-Afrikaanse vegters wil binne die volgende twee weke mnr. Jonas Savimbi se hoofkwartier in Jamba verower en hom doodmaak of gevange neem.

Hulle is onder andere A.M.R.G. Queros, wat die honoris crux-medalje vir dapperheid verwerf het en die opleidingspan lei. Verder is daar Ruis Jinquera, Tony Viera, albei oud-VK-lede, Lafras Luitingh, lid van die ontbinde BSB, Buks Buys, vroeër van Militêre Intelligensie, en ene Gonzalves, wat oud-

Beeld's deceptive article alleging EO was planning to assassinate Savimbi (photo: Beeld)

were part of a CIA operation and were planning to attack the UNITA base at Jamba and murder Dr Jonas Savimbi.

The fact that Jamba was more than 1 400 kilometres from Soyo across almost unnavigable bush country was obviously not deemed relevant. According to the article, we were now 'the Springbok team' of soldiers. It furthermore falsely claimed that seven men had already flown from Botswana to Angola.

In another March 1993 issue of the same newspaper, Freek Swart, reporting from Washington, accused the MPLA of conducting ethnic cleansing operations in Angola. I had to wonder if he was trying to imply that Executive Outcomes was involved.

A steadily escalating campaign aimed at vilifying both the Angolan government and Executive Outcomes (while at the same time presenting UNITA as the only Angolan movement seeking peace) began to gather momentum, this despite UNITA having rejected the results of the 1992 UN-supervised election and opting to return to war.

Larney Keller was equally concerned about what the media was doing but he kept his head down.

"You own the company that got the contract—you better take the flak for it," he said.

I couldn't blame him. I appreciated that he too had a lot at stake, and I wasn't about to sacrifice him or his company just to lighten my load.

On 12 March I phoned Buckingham in London. I was becoming increasingly concerned that the media storm might prompt the Namibian authorities to apprehend my men as potential 'war criminals' while they were transiting through that country.

"Tony, this whole thing is becoming a total fuck-up," I said.

"Yes, it's a bit of a circus," he answered. "Do you think someone is feeding these journalists stories or are they just bloody stupid?" he asked.

"I think it's a bit of both. I suspect some of them are employed by the intelligence agencies. I also think someone is becoming increasingly worried about the fact that we are going into Angola for whatever reason. They've branded us as mercenaries and we will now have to be prepared to fight once we get to Soyo. My immediate concern, however, is that we might pick up problems in Windhoek when the guys transit to Angola."

Buckingham undertook to liaise with Sonangol, and called back within the hour to say that Joaquim David had spoken to the Angolan government, who in turn had liaised with the Namibian government and cleared any possible obstacles in our path.

From Windhoek the men were to be airlifted to their Angolan transit area by ProPilot, a small air charter company owned by Crause Steyl—a maverick pilot and a born flyer.

In South Africa my real problems were just beginning. We had booked a number of commercial flights (with only small groups travelling on each) through Nedtravel, a small travel agency in Brooklyn Mall, Pretoria. Shortly after the advance party left, we were told that the travel agency's manageress had gone to Military Intelligence and handed over a list of everyone who had booked tickets to Windhoek. She had obviously been reading the newspapers. It was furthermore rumoured that she had been well paid for this great intelligence coup—quite likely. MI appeared to have plenty of money to waste. Had they taken the trouble to call me, I would have provided them with the list myself. Instead, in

their own inimitable fashion, they had thrown money at 'intelligence whores' in an attempt to build credibility regarding Executive Outcomes' 'sinister motives'.

The misleading media reports on Executive Outcomes had compromised what was supposed to have been a legitimate, simple, and safe security task. In fact, every man and his dog knew who had signed the Executive Outcomes contract. We were committing no crimes and breaking no laws, yet we were being treated as though we were on the world's most wanted list.

Perhaps those pen-pushing warriors of MI and fake diplomats at Foreign Affairs believed this was one way of retaining their jobs, which would soon be in the balance—it was by now becoming clear that President FW de Klerk was about to conduct a massive house-cleaning operation within the intelligence services. In addition, the ANC was going to stand as a political party in the 1994 elections; if it came into power, they had no guarantees regarding the security of their jobs.

At least I knew which travel agency to strike off my shopping list.

"You realise that the men will probably have to fight when they get to Soya," I said to Larney, "And you can bet UNITA won't give up Soyo without a massive fight." "I know. But you're the one who must make the judgement call on whether to go ahead or abort," Larney replied.

"The media has already branded us as mercenaries so we may as well go ahead with the job. Are you sure you still want to go or would you prefer to stay behind and let me go instead?"

"No thanks. I'll go. You can stay and take the shit from the media. Just keep me out of it," Larney responded with a laugh.

The remaining men of the unarmed and under-strength Executive Outcomes team flew out from either Grand Central or Lanseria Airport, both smaller airports north of Johannesburg. By 15 March 1993 the men were finally on the ground and assembled at an old Cuban Air Force base at Cabo Ledo south of Luanda. There they would wait until the Angolan army launched its assault to capture Soyo. Buckingham and his recovery crews were also on standby and waiting for the FAA to make its move.

Since Larney had opted to go to Angola, I could no longer work from his offices. I moved the business into my house at 317 Danny Street, Lynnwood Park, Pretoria, for the duration of the contract. This would later become known as Executive Outcomes' official 'sinister' headquarters, which various newspaper reports would describe as a 'lavish residence' bought with the proceeds of the Soyo contract—despite me having owned it long before Soya was ever mentioned.

The Angolan military at Cabo Ledo, home of the FAA Special Forces Commandos, initially regarded my men with considerable suspicion. This was not surprising. The Angolans had often come off second best on the battlefields where they had first met. To many of them, we were still the enemy.

Unexpectedly, I received several phone calls from serving members of Special Forces who had heard about the contract in Soyo and wanted to be part of the operation, even if it was only for a month.

"We'll take leave," they said.

The next morning, Captain Shaun Gullan, Sergeant Renier van der Merwe, and Corporal Cornel Taljaard appeared on my doorstep raring to go.

I happily signed them up and despatched them to Cabo Ledo. Their appearance was a relief as I required a further leavening of experience to bolster the group. I did, however, consider the possibility that they had been planted by Special Forces to gain intelligence on what was happening in Angola. After all, I had trained Special Forces in this type of intelligence operation, so I could hardly blame them if that was their mission. Shaun Gullan, in fact, had been one of my students.

We were embarking on a perfectly legal security project, so having such agents around didn't bother me—as long as they didn't endanger the lives of my men. I later learnt that they had actually gone AWOL to join their friends. Even if I had known, I would still gladly have signed them up. I needed men on the ground.

I maintained daily contact with Larney and Buks in Cabo Ledo by satellite phone, and kept them abreast of how I thought various media reports were likely to affect the operation.

On the positive side, the men were upbeat and not particularly concerned about what the media was reporting, or what anyone else was saying.

I again voiced my concerns to Buckingham about the stories circulating in the media. He told me he had spoken to Joaquim David and that the Angolan government had given its blessing for the men to be issued with automatic weapons. The Angolans were now taking the lives of my men very seriously indeed—something I was grateful for.

I also had no doubt that MI had, via their covert channels to UNITA, issued a warning to watch out for us. I relayed this concern to Buks and Larney in Cabo Ledo, who in turn told the men. According to Buks, that did not alter the situation or bother anyone.

What did concern them, however, was that they felt Buks was not the best man to lead them if the shooting started and wanted him replaced. That was a problem I would need to resolve.

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Things seldom turn out the way one plans them. As a result of Angolan bureaucracy, the military delayed their assault on Soyo and what was supposed to have been a month-long contract slowed down, leaving my men stuck in Cabo Ledo.

Out of necessity, I became a one-man logistical supply organisation, ensuring that the men got regular consignments of fresh food and other requirements. My days were spent rushing to the Makro superstore to buy fresh provisions, and then racing to Grand Central airport where a ProPilot aircraft would be waiting. I had to clear the provisions through customs and personally load the aircraft as the pilot needed to rest, having just landed from the long incoming flight.

Meanwhile, MI and the Department of Foreign Affairs had made me their prime target, and the media was acting as their faithful advocate—and as UNITA's chief propagandist. Despite my constant nagging, both Joaquim David and Tony Buckingham refused to be

drawn into media discussions and I became the unofficial spokesman for Sonangol and Heritage Oil & Gas by default.

Special Forces remained seemingly unconcerned about the unfolding drama and I continued to work for them, although the atmosphere was becoming somewhat strained. Debswana also continued to demand my services and I began to feel that it was only a matter of time before I collapsed unless I found someone to help me. Trying to maintain a high state of alertness for twenty hours a day with only snatches of sleep in-between had become an ongoing nightmare.

I would never have believed that a little town called Soya could become such a big problem for me.

Grand Central Airport was initially used by EO to support the men at Soyo (photo: African Pilot Magazine)

08:
Battle for Soyo and Surrounds

By early March 1993 the men were all in Angola and had completed their marryingup drills.

Instead of the 50 I had initially planned for, I was forced to recruit 72 men because of the potential danger I anticipated once they got to Soyo. Fifty-six of the contingent were South African Border War veterans, including many from 32 Battalion, Special Forces, the Paras, Koevoet, and other elite units. A few conmen and one or two comic book heroes had also bluffed their way into the company. It had been easy for them to slip in as there had been no time to enforce a strict vetting procedure.

Once suitably armed with AK-47 assault rifles and PKM machine guns, the men started training in earnest to augment their chances of survival. The media had put us between a rock and a hard place. If we chose to fight UNITA, we would be classified as mercenaries. If we chose not to fight, the men would probably be killed or captured. The choice was easy for me; the men's lives and my company's reputation depended on it.

I contacted Buks Buys on the satellite phone and told him what problems the men could expect to encounter when they arrived at Soyo. I expected UNITA to be ready and waiting and I didn't want the men to be caught off guard. I decided they should prepare for war. If it came to that, I wanted them to be able to protect themselves. I also had increasingly grave reservations about the FAA's ability to capture and hold Soyo, and believed that the men might be faced with that task if the FAA failed. There would be no other way to honour our contract with Sonangol and Heritage Oil. "Buks, I want our men to assist the FAA as much as possible in taking Soyo.

We have been forced into this situation and now we'll just have to live with the consequences. If anyone disagrees, tell them to pack their bags—we don't need them." Due to the media's ever-growing interest and inflammatory reporting on the company, Buks and some of the men conducted a joint planning session with the FAA commanders at Cabo Ledo. It was apparent that the FAA did not, as previously claimed, have current intelligence on the ground. What was known was that UNITA had established bases at the Campo Oito pumping station (located to the south- west of Soyo at a small facility known as Quefiquena) and at Sumba (approximately twenty kilometres to the east of Soyo). It appeared that UNITA expected any attempt to retake Soyo to come from the direction of Sumba. That was where the intelligence ended.

A simple plan was devised: a joint helicopter assault and amphibious landing would retake Quefiquena, as this was considered to be the more lightly defended area. Executive Outcomes (EO) would conduct the heliborne assault to secure and hold the beachhead, and the FAA would carry out the amphibious landing with infantry and armour. The FAA accepted this plan and also agreed to ensure adequate air support by means of Mi-24 helicopter gunships and MiG-23 strike aircraft.

If Quefiquena could be secured, it would give the FAA a firm base from which to expand their operations. It was assessed that UNITA considered an attack on Quefiquena highly unlikely (hence their apparently poor defence of the area). Their planning was most probably based on the fact that, up to that point, the FAA had never launched a successful amphibious or heliborne assault.

At Cabo Ledo the men continued to rehearse all aspects of warfare, conducting offensive and defensive exercises, zeroing weapons, emergency medical aid, and practising night patrols, house clearing, and reconnaissance. The FAA commenced training their amphibious force.

As the oil companies became increasingly concerned about the amount of money they were losing to curtailed production and penalties, they asked for the operational timeline to be advanced. Sonangol approved this dramatic revision and two weeks of refresher training was slashed to one week. The date for the operation was set for 16 March 1993.

FAA elements left Cabo Ledo a few days later by barge and sailed up to the mouth of the Congo River—their starting point for the amphibious landing.

On 15 March, the EO men were flown to Cabinda,[123] the jump-off point for the operation. Cabinda offered the shortest possible flights to Soyo, not far to the south. It was also under FAA control which afforded some safety prior to the assault.

Cabinda was the jumping-off point for the EO air assault on Soyo (photo: GabisWORLD.com)

After the vote of no confidence in Buks Buys' ability as a commander, I agreed to replace him with Lafras Luitingh, an ex-Special Forces soldier who had proved his mettle in combat on more than one occasion. Lafras reassessed the situation and decided on a plan of action that would allow for flexibility, surprise, speed, and survivability. He divided the men into three groups, giving each specific tasks for the assault on Quefiquena. The first group (under Phil Smith[124]) would act as an early warning/stopper group east of Quefiquena. The other two groups (under Harry Carlse[125] and Lafras) would launch an assault on the oil base.

That night the men, who were billeted in tents, experienced a heavy tropical downpour. Meanwhile, a three-man assault swimmer team led by Shaun Gullan made a clandestine

beach landing near the main oil complex. Working alongside Shaun were Renier van der Merwe and Herkie du Preez.[126] Their task was to reconnoitre UNITA's defences and activities at Quefiquena and locate and mark an LZ for the three Mi-8 assault helicopters as well as the amphibious assault's landing area.

I was still extremely concerned about the sort of reception the men would get at Soyo. I knew that most of them would be able to fight back if faced with fire from UNITA but I didn't have much confidence in the Angolan military. What if they failed to arrive on time and my men were cut off? How would I be able to help them? I was also somewhat anxious about the competence of the Angolan helicopter pilots: our men were used to South African pilots who would fly through fire to extract them if necessary—would the Angolan pilots do the same?

What worried me most of all, though, was that—thanks to the media and its sources—UNITA had been well forewarned of our impending 'invasion' and they'd had ample time to turn Soyo and its surrounds into a defensive strong-point. The battle indications the media had given UNITA could cost the lives of several of my men—probably much to the glee of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and MI who seemed to have their own reasons for wanting EO to fail in its mission.

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Before dawn on 16 March, three Mi-8s, laden with EO assault teams, lifted off and headed south for the LZ at Quefiquena.

In Pretoria at about 05:00 South African time, I received a frantic telephone call from one of my old CCB agents in London.

"Eeben, you guys are in big shit," Richard said. "A friend of a friend who works at GCHQ,[127] Cheltenham, intercepted a telephone call from the South African Parliament building in Cape Town to the UNITA representative in London last night—a fellow by the name of Samakovo[128] or something like that. Someone in your government has told UNITA to hang on to Soyo, regardless of the cost."

"Jeez, Richard, are you sure of this?"

"I am one hundred percent sure. You by name and your company—'Executive something'—were mentioned."

It felt as though I had been punched in the stomach. I needed to stop the planned assault before the men found themselves trapped without any escape. I desperately tried to contact Lafras on the satellite phone and warn him, but I was too late—they were already airborne and on their way to the LZ. All I could do was hope that UNITA had not received the message in time to prepare a hostile reception committee for the men.

I was aware that the media, and I suspected MI, had been forewarning UNITA of what was coming, but to hear that UNITA had been warned by someone inside the South African government shocked me. I would much later discover why the South African government was so anxious for UNITA to hold on to Soyo.

Meanwhile, unaware of the danger facing them, the men continued their mission. Either the clandestine team had marked a poor LZ or the inexperienced Angolan pilots were too scared to land where they should have. The result was that the men, laden with weapons and ammunition, were dropped approximately one-and-a-half kilometres from the target and had to cover the distance to Quefiquena on foot at speed.

On the ground a deathly silence fell over the men. Knowing that UNITA had now been alerted to their arrival, surprise went out the window. Aggression and speed were their only defences and they decided to move and attack as fast as they could.

Then, approximately 100 metres to their front, they heard voices. As they silently readied themselves for their first firefight, someone shouted, "Moenie fokken skiet nie—dis ons!"[129]

Black-faced and wide-eyed, Shaun, Herkie, and Renier emerged from the bush. After a few nervous greetings, Phil Smith headed to the east of the target while the remaining two teams struggled through dense elephant grass and reeds to reach the heavy chain link perimeter fence.

With everyone still trying to catch their breath, Lafras cut the fence and the men poured into the Quefiquena oil complex.

Their first brief firefight came minutes later when they ran into a UNITA vehicle. They quickly destroyed it and killed its occupants, and then crossed the small tar road leading into the complex. UNITA had indeed been forewarned and a hail of incoming fire greeted them. Unable to see UNITA's firing positions, the men responded with heavy retaliatory fire and tried to find cover where they could.

It was then discovered that someone had left the small patrol mortar at the LZ. Without it they would be unable to deliver the much-needed indirect fire support. Mauritz le Roux, an ex-sapper, volunteered to retrieve it from the LZ and took off at a mad run. Both Lafras and Harry Carlse refused to send anyone with Mauritz and he was left to contend with whoever might try to stop him on his own. He completed his dash in record time and soon re-joined the rest of the men with the mortar.

While desperately trying to keep UNITA's heads down, the group split itself into two teams. The first team, under Lafras' command, fought its way into the main oil complex; the second team (Piet Pienaar, Carl Dietz, Geoff Landsberg, Jonathan Leach, and several other men) moved rapidly to secure the fence line from any UNITA breakthrough. During this manoeuvre, the UNITA troops signalled to one another by means of whistles—something they had been taught by the South Africans years before—and heavy fire started coming from an old workshop area. Pienaar, Dietz, and Leach, with part of their team, immediately assaulted the workshop and cleared it room-by-room.

After almost two hours of intense fighting, the complex was under EO control. Lafras established a defensive perimeter and placed the men in their positions. Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, Phil Smith, Chris Papenfuss, and some other men were still holding off another UNITA attack. The men could hear the sound of a DShK (Soviet 12.7mm heavy machine gun) interrupting the clatter of AKs. The occasional boom of an exploding RPG-7 rocket added to the din. Eventually, the firing died down.

Then an eerie calm descended over the complex and, believing the worst was over, the men settled down to wait for the promised Angolan troops to arrive.

Phil Smith and his team joined the main group a while later.

"Lafras, get the men ready. UNITA are mobilising en mass and heading this way. Where the hell are the Angolan troops?" Phil asked.

"Not here yet," answered Lafras.

For a brief second, Lafras caught a glimpse of worry in that great soldier's eye.

Despite their undertakings, the Angolan forces had failed to conduct their amphibious landing to support EO's men in Soyo. In fact, EO was doing what the Angolan forces were supposed to have done—take and hold Soyo.

"Fuck it then—let's get ready. UNITA's not going to be taking prisoners," Phil remarked to no one in particular.

Lafras sounded the alarm and the word was passed amongst the men, who dug in where they could. Together with a few others, Carlse, Leach, du Preez, Coetzee, and Papenfuss, volunteered to defend the southern perimeter. With the sea to the west and UNITA to the south and east, Lafras decided that if the base was overrun, they would escape and evade in a northerly direction, taking any wounded with them if possible. Everyone, however, knew that there would be no escaping and evading— due north lay the wide Congo River mouth, not to mention a little town called Soyo.

A wave of incoming fire hit the men from the south at approximately 10:00. The intensity and accuracy of the barrage was overwhelming and the shrill Portuguese call, 'Avançar' (advance/attack) was heard above the clatter of gunfire. UNITA had launched their counter-attack.

The UNITA forces threw everything they had at the EO defences. They were successfully repelled but immediately attempted another attack from the east and started edging towards the outer perimeter. Heavy fire was exchanged between the attacking UNITA forces and the defending EO men. Despite the overwhelming fire from UNITA, the men desperately held their positions and returned fire.

After two more hours of intense fighting, a number of EO's men had been lightly wounded and were starting to run out of ammunition. Huddling together to divide up what they had, they now realised they faced a very real danger of being overrun, and braced themselves for the inevitable.

UNITA had meanwhile withdrawn and were obviously planning a new assault on the EO positions.

At approximately 13:00, the southern perimeter once again came alive with a fresh attack. Pouring out a deluge of fire, UNITA edged even closer to the perimeter fence. The men desperately tried to return fire as effectively as possible but could not see the advancing enemy through the thick bushy terrain. UNITA on the other hand, knew the area well as it had been under their control for some time.

The FAA amphibious force finally arrived in the middle of the raging battle for the oil complex. It was a matter of rather late than never.

Despite heavy incoming fire, Lafras despatched Geoff Landsberg, Harry Carlse, and Louis du Preez to assist the FAA with the beach landings and guide them to the EO

positions. The three-man team watched in horror as the heavy Russian-built barge came in on a turning tide, and stranded itself parallel to the shore.

Undeterred, the barge captain lowered the ramp into the water. The first Unimog drove down and promptly disappeared beneath the surf. Not to be outdone, a second Unimog also attempted to snorkel to shore and was equally unsuccessful.

Determined to exploit this failure, a tank rolled off the barge and promptly settled onto the seabed, approximately 100 metres from the beach. This made it impossible for the landing to continue as planned. At least the loss of the Unimogs and the tank was not a complete disaster; they now served as a submerged bridge for the remaining vehicles. Two T-54 tanks and two DAF trucks finally made it to the beach to await orders.

Then one of the tanks got bogged down on the beach and ended up burning out its clutch, rendering it virtually useless. The fourth tank remained stranded on the barge which was itself now firmly stuck in the sand.

The FAA tank that got bogged down on the beach at Soyo several years after the failed amphibious landing (photo: unknown)

Back at the oil complex, UNITA had gained ground with each attack. Now they were close enough to be able to shout obscenities (punctuated by the odd hand grenade) at the men, who clung doggedly to their positions using their AKs and PKMs to devastating effect.

By 14:00 UNITA started targeting the western perimeter.

And then, suddenly things fell silent. As quickly as they had appeared, UNITA melted back into the dense bush. They obviously needed time to regroup, replenish their ammunition, and rethink their tactics. Besides, the EO men were not going anywhere. They were surrounded and UNITA knew it.

The men had been fighting continuously for almost eight hours. Even though they had been left to fend for themselves with no support, they had managed to hold the oil complex and a small beachhead for the scheduled FAA amphibious landing.

Despite a disastrous beginning, a company of FAA soldiers—minus their much needed personal equipment—managed to make it safely ashore. By late afternoon the beach was

scattered with washed-up sleeping bags, webbing, and soaking wet infantrymen. FAA did, however, bring desperately needed ammunition with them.

The promised Angolan air support arrived hours later and proved totally ineffective as the pilots released their payloads from too high up. The only target they hit was the Atlantic Ocean.

Meanwhile, UNITA gleefully watched the unfolding drama on the beachhead. Despite FAA being vulnerable due to the chaos of the landing, for some reason, aside from some sporadic firing, UNITA did not interfere.

A FAA infantry company eventually managed to link up with my men and were ordered to hold and strengthen the position EO had taken.

The wounded were tended to, ammunition was replenished, and the EO and FAA personnel had a quick meal before deploying between the onshore oil facilities and the beach for the night.

During South Africa's war in Angola, the night had generally belonged to the South Africans, but things had changed, and given the ferocity of the UNITA attacks, the men took no chances and dug in. UNITA's attacks had been unexpectedly well disciplined and executed, and several men were jokingly reprimanded for having provided them with training during the SADF's occupation of southern Angola.

At 03:00 the men were woken by the sound of 82mm mortar rounds being dropped down their tubes and hitting their baseplates. Then there was an eruption of incoming AK-47 and PKM machine-gun fire. This attack was met with a blistering volley of return fire and the UNITA assault soon withered.

By morning, the men were exhausted. Empty ammunition boxes lay scattered between their foxholes and the mortar craters that punctuated the area bore grim testimony to the battle. Lafras moved his men to an old trench system that had been discovered a few hundred metres to their south and then took Jonathan Leach and Chris Papenfuss aboard the barge to resolve the perplexing problem of getting the stranded tank ashore. They soon came under a UNITA mortar bombardment with bombs landing close to the barge. In response, the tank commander rounded up his crew and aimed at the UNITA positions through the barge's front bulkhead, cranes, and cables. A deafening shockwave reverberated through the barge as the single round was fired. The recoil caused the tank to hurtle backwards and it slammed into the main bridge. By then, the barge captain and his crew were in a state of total panic, and pandemonium broke out between the tank and naval crews. My men wisely decided it was time to withdraw to the safety of their trenches. The tank was finally driven off the barge and onto the beach.

Later that day Colonel Pepe de Castro, the FAA commander—familiarly known as Colonel Pepe— asked my men to join him in planning FAA's next move. He had realised they were fighting hard—not to mention having survived and held off numerous sustained attacks on their positions—and soon took them into his confidence. They all became friends, despite his brutal manner of enforcing discipline, which included personally executing his men if he felt they were acting in a cowardly manner. This was something the South Africans were not used to.

Lafras redeployed a team to secure part of Quefiquena. Simultaneously he despatched another small team to secure an LZ for the helicopters that would be bringing in the rest of their equipment and an ammunition resupply. Both these teams were able to secure their objectives.

Just as excitement started mounting about the resupply, the men got bad news. The helicopters would not be arriving. And then UNITA launched another massive counter-attack. While making a fighting withdrawal, Geoff Landsberg was shot through the foot and went down. Harry Carlse and Louis du Preez dashed through a hail of bullets to drag him to the sparse cover provided by a small sandbank and then returned fire while waiting for an opportunity to withdraw and link up with the rest of the EO group.

As suddenly as it had started, the firing stopped.

The lull gave the men time to move back to where Lafras had now established a temporary HQ and a medic hastily attended to Landsberg's wound. Harry Ferreira was sent to assist Pienaar and Dietz in their attempts to silence the enemy fire coming from a workshop area.

On the way there, Harry was wounded in the arm by a sniper, effectively taking him out of action.

UNITA had again surrounded the men.

During another vicious firefight, UNITA again infiltrated close to the EO positions and tossed hand grenades attempting to kill, wound, or demoralise whoever they could. The dense grass and shrubbery provided the cover they needed. The men retaliated with massive fire and eventually drove UNITA back.

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At about this time, I received a telephone call from Colonel Dave Baker of the South African Police, who informed me that the SAP had been ordered to investigate my company's 'criminal' activities in Angola. Whatever EO was doing had caused alarm bells to go off in the South African government.

I agreed to meet him but my priority was taking care of my men—I couldn't cease work to speak to the SAP. I asked him to postpone for several hours as I was just then on my way out to purchase food and other supplies for my men. I would also have to load the aircraft myself to ensure as quick a turnaround time as possible.

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Under the command of Colonel Pepe, the FAA troops were deployed in all-round defence, effectively forming a perimeter (albeit a weak one) around the Executive Outcomes team.

The men watched with uneasy bemusement as it became obvious that the FAA troops were ill trained and had very little ammunition of their own. Some of the men helped the young recruits by providing them with additional ammunition and making their rifles serviceable.

When nightfall finally came, the EO personnel were exhausted from the day's fighting. They were proud of what they had achieved against overwhelming odds and they well deserved the respite that night would bring. The commanders of the two stopper groups now also came into the complex to receive their night orders from Lafras.

In addition to the FAA cordon, Lafras decided to mount night patrols and sent a team comprising Harry Carlse, 'Snorre' Vermeulen, Geoff Landsberg (despite being wounded), Jonathan Leach, and several other men to secure the high ground overlooking the beachhead area. UNITA saw this move and laid a barrage of fire down on them. Lafras decided to withdraw the team and the firing died down again.

At approximately 22:00 Lafras called me on the satellite phone.

"We've kicked UNITA's arses right out of Quefiquena, but it hasn't been easy. I have four men wounded—Geoff Landsberg, Harry Ferreira, Nico Bosman, and Oosie Oosthuizen."

"Oh, shit. How bad?"

"Two of the guys were hit by rifle fire; the third fell down an overgrown manhole. The fourth was wounded by RPG-7 shrapnel. Otherwise, we are all tired but okay."

"Have you arranged for a casevac?"

"I'll have to wait till morning—it's too dodgy to attempt one now." "Do you want me to come up there?" I asked.

"Negative, I think we're okay. You're more use to us down there. Someone has to make sure we get what we need when we need it. What we do need up here is a very good doctor—fast."

"Any suggestions?" I asked.

Lafras gave me the contact details of Dr Francis Smit, a well-known surgeon from Bloemfontein who had worked with Special Forces and was known and respected by many of the men.

"Okay, I'll contact him right away. Just keep me posted on what's happening and what you need me to do."

Lafras then told me that fourteen of the men felt northern Angola was too dangerous and wanted to resign with immediate effect. I couldn't blame them. By all accounts, UNITA had given them much more than they'd signed up for. I also couldn't blame men who felt they had lost their fighting spirit.

Lafras didn't want them replaced and said he would move them out of the area as soon as he could. We agreed to withdraw them to Cabo Ledo and isolate them for a few days to prevent them from passing fresh intelligence to anyone in South Africa. "We need better support and more of it. Do you want us to stay or withdraw? If we withdraw, I reckon the defence of the facility will collapse," Lafras informed me. "Now that the Angolan army are there, let them deal with UNITA," I replied. Lafras laughed. "FAA sent in green troops. They are inexperienced and shit- scared and won't even budge from their positions. There's no way we can rely on them if trouble comes."

"Lafras, I'm sitting in Pretoria—you're on the ground. All I can say is I think it would be better for you to decide what to do. If you decide to stay, it would be better for you to attack them before they reach you. Truth be told, I don't really know what to tell you with

all the shit at this end. I think you should take whatever defensive or offensive action you deem necessary. Take the fight to them if you can, as long as the men aren't exposed to any unnecessary danger."

"I agree—we must be more offensive—if I can convince the Angolans to provide support, we can drive UNITA off before they reach us. If these Angolan recruits are too yellow to fight, we'll just have to do it ourselves."

And so Executive Outcomes began to adopt an offensive posture to protect themselves. The media blowback would be vicious, as would condemnations from the DFA and MI. It seemed the only acceptable option to South Africa would have been for our men to throw up their hands and allow UNITA to attack and wipe them out. UNITA, on the other hand, was following their orders from South Africa—which were to attack and kill every EO member.

UNITA forces move forward to attack a target (photo: Reuters/Wendy Schwegmann)

Lafras was extremely worried that UNITA was about to throw whatever they had left at his men and he expected our casualties to be high. Until then Executive Outcomes had held its position but he was unsure how long the FAA would be able to hold on to theirs.

My men were also spoiling for a fight; UNITA had caused casualties amongst their friends and they wanted retribution.

That night I phoned Francis Smit. Despite his busy schedule as a surgeon, he agreed to fly from Bloemfontein to Pretoria and meet me early the next morning.

16 March 1993 had been a long day indeed.

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At 06:00 on 17 March, I received a phone call from a man who spoke with a heavy Afrikaans accent. He refused to identify himself but he was obviously up to speed with what was happening in Soyo.

"We are going to make sure that you and all your men at Soyo die," he said, "UNITA are our friends and we will not allow you to carry on with what you are doing. You are fucking communists."

"Instead of threatening me over the phone like a coward, why don't you come over and threaten me face-to-face? That way we can settle your problem any way you want to."

He didn't bother to answer my challenge, instead he hung up. This was the first of many threatening phone calls I would get. I dealt with these on my own as the men at Soyo were facing far worse problems. It did, however, strike me as odd that he had castigated me for being a 'communist' while he supported a Maoist like Savimbi.

I called Lafras. He told me they'd had a busy night engaged in firefight after firefight throughout, as UNITA tried to overrun their positions. He was planning to medevac the wounded to Windhoek as soon as possible. During the night, small reconnaissance patrols had been sent out to determine UNITA's intentions for the coming day, and the stopper groups had remained in place and were waiting to hit back if and when needed. Each assault had been driven back with fierce fire from my men, who didn't yield an inch to UNITA. The raw FAA recruits did their best to deliver what fire they could. To them, this was indeed a fierce baptism of fire.

More disturbing was the fact that the HF and VHF radios provided by the FAA had proved unreliable and there was now a total communications breakdown between the men on the ground. Being experienced soldiers, however, they had made plans to overcome this problem.

At about 09:00 on 17 March 1993, Dr Francis Smit arrived at my house. "Francis, I need help...Lafras and a small team of men are stuck in Soyo and they need a good doctor urgently. Lafras asked me to convince you to go and help them. We have four men wounded already."

"That's so typical of you guys—always getting yourselves into shit," he answered with a smile. "When does Lafras want me there?"

"How does tomorrow sound?"

"That means I won't even be able to say goodbye to my wife!" "You can call her on my phone," I answered helpfully.

"Okay; what do I do to sign up? If the guys need me that badly I'd better get going," he said without further hesitation.

He spent the rest of the day arranging his flight and buying the clothing and equipment he would need for his journey north. He left his briefcase and city clothes in my cupboard.

He asked me to tell his wife that he had accepted a short contract on a North Sea oil rig if she called looking for him.

"Francis, that is a shit excuse," I said.

"I know but it's the only one I have. If she knew where I was really off to, she'd kill me," he responded, laughing.

Francis left on the next flight to Windhoek, en route to Quefiquena. He stopped briefly in Windhoek to meet doctors at the MediCity hospital and streamline what would become our medevac procedure for the Soyo operation. He also arranged for medicines and other medical support equipment to be sent to Cabinda. The hospital wasted no time in sending the bill to me.

Later that morning, SAP Colonel Baker and his team arrived at my Danny Street house/office and began their investigation into Executive Outcomes. He was assisted by

Major Martiens Ras and Captain Riaan Bellingham. Baker and his team appeared embarrassed about their task but their orders had come from the SAP's Counter Espionage and Crime Intelligence HQ. I understood the position they were in—'Orders are orders'.

"I'm sorry we have to question you like a common criminal," said Baker. "You may or may not realise it but you have angered a lot of people in high places. They want you stopped as soon as possible."

"I'm aware of that," I answered, "I understand you have a job to do and I'll help wherever I can but there are some things I simply have to do. I might have to rush out and get things done for the men in Soyo."

"That will make it easier for us. Off the record, as far as the SAP is concerned, you have broken no laws. We have, however, been ordered to investigate this entire operation and will require you to tell us exactly what is going on. We will also need to see any relevant documentation and it may or may not be used as evidence against you. We'll try to stay out of your way but if you don't object we now need to take a statement from you."

After that, Colonel Baker and his investigative team became a semi-permanent fixture at my Danny Street office. They were highly professional and at no stage did they make me feel as though I was under siege.

At 10:30 on 17 March, the FAA, having realised that the situation was touch and go, started sending reinforcements to the beachhead by helicopter.

The helicopters dropped the FAA reinforcements off and our wounded men were ordered to board. The fourteen men who had lost their nerve were also sent out. Everyone was flown to the initial base camp in Cabinda.

The remaining men spent the rest of the day assisting Colonel Pepe in deploying his troops to an outer perimeter around the oil facility. The task was interrupted by sporadic enemy fire as UNITA tried to launch a counter-attack to regain Quefiquena. My men fought back like demons and several of them performed extraordinary feats, braving fire to assist their friends, carrying and distributing ammunition under fire, and facing death with little regard for their own safety. Unfortunately, these courageous acts would never be recognised by anyone except the men engaged in a life and death battle at Soyo.

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With Quefiquena finally secured and held by the FAA, Colonel Pepe and Lafras decided to launch a joint attack on Campo Oito (UNITA's command and logistics headquarters in the area). If Campo Oito was not neutralised it would not be possible to take and hold Soyo without the threat of a counter-attack. With one T-54 tank, a company of FAA infantry, and ten EO men under Phil Smith's command, the attack commenced on the morning of 18 March. They were unable to achieve surprise due to the rumbling of the tank and UNITA poured heavy fire into the attacking force. Nevertheless, the enemy was driven back by the ferocity of the attackers.

During the ensuing firefight we lost our first man killed in action—Buks Erasmus. He was killed by a rifle grenade that exploded against the T-54 tank.

This infuriated the men and they attacked with even more venom, forcing UNITA to flee in disarray. When the men swept through the abandoned area they found evidence that UNITA had been occupying Campo Oito for a long time. They also found a headband with a partial scalp of blonde hair attached to it—the first evidence that UNITA had some Europeans in its ranks. We never discovered who these Europeans were.

Despite Buks' death, Campo Oito had been taken relatively quickly and without too much of a fight from UNITA once their initial resistance had been overcome. Leaving the FAA to control and dominate the area, the EO personnel returned to Quefiquena, saddened and exhausted.

Lafras advised me that Buks had been killed later that night. "Oh, God, Buks served with me in 32 Battalion."

"I know. I'm sorry I'm the one who had to tell you."

Buks' body was flown out to Cabinda and from there to Luanda. There were no daily flights from Luanda to Pretoria, so it was decided to fly his remains home to his family via Portugal. Buks was accompanied to Luanda by his friend Iwan van der Merwe.

The wounded were flown to Cabo Ledo by one of Crause Steyl's pilots. FAA Major Antonio Lucas assisted with the refuelling before the flight continued to Windhoek's Eros Airport. On its approach to Windhoek,[130] the plane was forced to return to Cabo Ledo as Eros Airport had shut down at 19:30 and the pilot was refused permission to make a night landing.

General Joao Baptiste De Matos, the supreme commander of the Angolan armed forces, flew in to the combat zone and congratulated my men on what they had achieved in such a short space of time. He and his staff also expressed their condolences at Buks' death and wished the men well. It struck the men as somewhat ironic that their erstwhile enemy had taken the time to fly to the combat zone to thank them for their efforts.

A day later, the wounded men arrived in Windhoek where ambulances were waiting to take them to Windhoek MediCity for treatment. After two days in hospital they were hastily ushered from their beds and taken to Crause's home when it was discovered the media was trying to track them down to interview them.

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Early on the morning of 19 March, the wounded boarded a commercial flight from Windhoek to Johannesburg and were brought to my offices in Pretoria. They were carefully interviewed by the SAP who required each man to give a sworn affidavit outlining everything they had been through since having been recruited.

The media's feeding frenzy took off with a renewed vengeance. While many journalists simply tried to piece together the truth of the situation, one in particular bayed for my blood.

Ingo Capraro, reporting for Beeld on 19 March, wrote a story headed, 'Mercenary shot dead in Angola'. His article claimed that I had recruited my men for an American CIA operation. He then contradicted his own lies and stated that we had been recruited by the

MPLA but were being paid by an oil company. Whoever was feeding Capraro this information was making sure he had a good story, facts or no facts.

It was obvious to me that Capraro was desperately trying to create a name for himself as a 'war reporter', and given how gullible the South African public was, he did not disappoint them. In part his story read:

A large group of trained and battle-hardened South African fighters flew to Angola to capture Jamba. It appears as though the oil town of Soyo was their primary target but that they will still try to capture Jamba.[131]

His ignorance certainly extended to the geography of Angola. His personal attacks on me would escalate dramatically over the coming days.

By then I was working more than twenty hours a day, buying supplies, making and taking calls, loading aircraft, answering questions from Colonel Baker's team, paying money into the men's bank accounts, and getting medical supplies. My one consolation was that my men were working even harder and under more trying circumstances than I was.

During that period, we had an aircraft airborne every hour of the day, seven days a week, ferrying men and supplies. We had an operation to run and we would run it as best we could, come hell or high water.

That night I received another phone call from my friend in Special Forces. He told me that we had stirred up a hornet's nest and that Soyo was considered to be of utmost strategic value to UNITA. He also remarked that 'the politicians' wanted us out of Soyo. I wondered why a small coastal town in Angola should be of such vital importance to the South African government and hoped I would discover the answer soon.

In northern Angola, a joint planning session was under way. The aim: to recapture and hold the town of Soyo.

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The combined FAA-EO attack on Soyo was planned for 20 March. On the eve of 19 March, Lafras sent a small reconnaissance team to the town to determine UNITA's defensive positions. They were met by deafening silence. UNITA had withdrawn. It appeared they were expecting a large scale air and ground assault and didn't have the desire to make a stand. Instead they had retreated to their next fall-back position at Sumba, approximately twenty kilometres east of Soyo and close to the Congo River.

When our men swept through the town early the next morning, they were greeted by the sight of wild dogs feeding on the bodies of at least six young men that UNITA had executed for having refused to join their ranks.

With Soyo, Campo Oito and Quefiquena now under joint FAA-EO control, the situation had reached a semblance of stability. The Soyo Hotel became Executive Outcomes' HQ—but only after the mess UNITA had left behind had been cleared up.

UNITA had used the hotel as a hospital. Bloody bandages and blood-splattered floors and walls bore silent testimony to their many casualties.

The men were thrilled to find that the air conditioners and showers were in working condition and rewarded themselves with the luxury of a good scrub. They also found an abandoned Soviet D-30 howitzer, a number of 23mm and 14.5mm anti-aircraft weapons, and a bunker filled with much needed ammunition. The howitzer was quickly checked, serviced, and readied for use.

On 20 March, another serving Special Forces officer (also a friend of mine and of many of my men) called me from a pay-phone in the Voortrekkerhoogte area.

"I can't talk for long but I have to tell you—man, you guys have really hurt UNITA," he began.

"Well, they hurt us too and I am really pissed off."

"I can assure you that you have not taken as much damage as they have. In the latest signals intercepts they mentioned in excess of 200 of their troops having been killed and many more wounded. Some Moroccan Special Forces guys working with them have also been killed."

That there were Moroccan Special Forces fighting alongside UNITA was news to me. One consolation was that my men had given a thoroughly good account of themselves and UNITA would think twice before attempting to take them on again. Before I could call Lafras to give him this feedback, Ingo Capraro phoned me.

"Well Mister CCB, did you see the articles I wrote on you in Beeld today?" he enquired.

I tried to remain calm but inwardly I felt as though my heart was about to stop. "I don't rush out to buy the paper just to read what you have written every day, so no, I haven't seen your article," I answered.

"I suggest you look at it," he said. "I think the world would like to know that you were a member of the CCB. How does it feel to murder people?"

"I haven't got a clue," I responded, and hung up.

It dawned on me that someone within Special Forces or MI had been in direct or indirect contact with Capraro. Whoever it was must have had access to my CCB file. Needless to say, I rushed out to buy the Beeld.

Capraro had three articles under his byline on 20 March. All three implied a sinister backdrop to what was happening in Soyo and in South Africa. The three headlines read as follows:

'Mercenaries in Angola held over secret;

Chief recruiter knows foreign front organisations; Family of soldier killed in Angola, accepting.'

In his lead article he stated:

Fourteen South Africans who were recruited to participate as 'security guards' in the Angolan civil war and who refused to fight when they learnt that they would actually be

fighting for the MPLA, are being held back in Angola for fear of them speaking out ... Mr Barlow ... only recruits the people, they do not work for him and he has 'no idea' how they will be used... Mr Barlow ... manages an international 'security' company in Pretoria.

His second article read:

According to a document in possession of Beeld, he was a member of the disbanded Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) international division or cell 5 ... But his specialist field was front organisations and he did evaluations for the highly controversial CCB on the use of such companies locally as well as internationally.

"I never knew you were in the CCB," Colonel Baker said as he read the articles. "I thought we knew about everyone who was part of it."

"Well, so much for secrecy," I said. "Someone gave Capraro a lot of information—fortunately it seems they weren't too sure of what I was doing there but what he wrote could only have come from someone inside of Special Forces itself."

"Where were you?" Baker asked.

"I was the commander for Region 5. My stomping grounds were England, Europe, and the Middle East."

"You must have had one hell of a cover," Captain Bellingham chipped in. Before I had time to comment, Capraro called again.

"So, what do you think, Mister CCB?" he mocked. "Nothing. Your articles aren't worthy of comment."

"I still have more to come," he said with obvious glee.

"That's okay. Everything you write gives me clues about who you're really working for."

"Just keep an eye on my stories," he said and hung up.

I was somewhat concerned that my involvement in the CCB had now been blown open to the public. Not even my closest friends had known I was a member. Now that part of my life was being exposed by a journalist who apparently had a big axe to grind, and very clearly had a very cosy relationship with the intelligence services.

I called Lafras on the satellite phone and told him about the developments in the press. I also warned him that a lull in the fighting probably indicated that UNITA was regrouping and planning a major attack on Soyo.

"Good, we'll be waiting for them—this time we really will fuck them up," he responded.

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The speculation about Executive Outcomes' 'invasion of Angola' continued unabated. Capraro's stories contributed much of the 'background' information that was being splashed about but it was obvious that he was using his pen to serve someone in the South African government, and deliberately creating a negative perception of EO.

No mention was ever made of the fact that we had been asked to enter Angola for legitimate commercial reasons, or that our presence had been cleared by the Angolan

government at the highest level. Nor was it pointed out that the media had, in effect, warned and invited UNITA to block us with military force. We had known we were entering a high-risk area to conduct what should have been a security task, but we had been left with no option other than to fight.

Capraro continued to be a thorn in my side, taking great pleasure in attacking EO and myself whenever those who controlled him asked him to.

A few days later the situation was lightened by a bit of humour. Dr Francis Smit's wife, Bonny, phoned me. I was immediately on guard and ready with the cover story Francis had given me.

"Eeben, where is Francis?" she demanded.

"He ought to be on an oil rig in the North Sea—that's where I sent him a few days ago."

"Then why the hell did he phone me from Windhoek? Is he involved in this thing in Angola with you?"

Bonny was spitting mad and the obscene names she called me made me collapse with laughter, something I had been unable to do in a long while.

In an attempt to further 'criminalise' Executive Outcomes, the Department of Foreign Affairs issued a statement claiming that its offices had been burgled.

The Sunday Times of 21 March ran an article written by De Wet Potgieter and Sharon Chetty. Under the headline 'Foreign Affairs Burgled' it claimed that:

Offices of the Department of Foreign Affairs were burgled this week and it is believed that files on South African mercenaries in Angola were stolen.

Senior police sources told the Sunday Times that the break-in was a 'professional job' and that the apparent aim of the burglars was to remove material relating to mercenaries

The article further stated:

In another development this week, the Sunday Times obtained proof that Angola's MPLA government was behind the recruitment of 'security consultants' in South Africa. Despite recent denials by the MPLA that it was involved in the recruitment, the document proves that Sonangol, the state-run oil concern in which the MPLA is the major shareholder, contacted South African security experts to recruit men.

It was another pure fabrication. As a journalist, Potgieter should have known how to contact me had he wished to clarify the issue or question me about my involvement in the supposed burglary—especially since claiming 'material relating to mercenaries' had apparently been stolen.

Foreign Affairs burgled

OFFICES of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria were burgled this week and it is believed that files on South African mercenaries in Angola were stolen.

By DE WET POTGIETER and SHARON CHETTY

Foreign Affairs spokesman Patrick Evans confirmed that the offices of

"security consultants" in South Africa. Despite recent denials by the MPLA that it was involved in the recruitment, the document proves that Sonan-

Potgieter and Chetty's disinformation piece claiming a burglary at DFA. Potgieter was later outed as an MI agent.

The fact that he had chosen not to ask made me suspect that he was a propagandist under the control of either MI or the DFA.

The gist of the article was very clear for all to see. The implication was that EO had burgled the Department of Foreign Affairs' offices. As I was the only person manning the office, I would have to have been the villain who had perpetrated the dastardly deed.

Potgieter also played on the South African public's lack of knowledge about Angola, happily confusing Sonangol with the MPLA government, and also suffering several other lapses of truth. Even the SAP's investigators were taken aback by his false and misleading misreporting.

The investigation team, aware of the difficulties I was facing, took it upon themselves to help me wherever they could by making coffee, answering the phones on my behalf, and generally trying to lift my spirits.

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By now, Soyo and its surrounds had been stabilised and despite sporadic fire from UNITA, the men were holding out well. The FAA had established its HQ alongside ours and Colonel Pepe made a point of maintaining close liaison with my men. The daily routine included security patrols from the airfield at Soyo and a 30–35 kilometre round-trip to Quefiquena and Campo Oito to check on the FAA's troops. The security perimeter was being maintained by FAA troops and a 24-hour observation post had been established atop a microwave tower. I was later told that while clearing the harbour, the divers had found a container filled with bodies— apparently belonging to locals who had resisted UNITA's attempts to co-opt them into service.

The captured Soviet D-30 howitzer had been moved to a position alongside the old communications towers within the oil complex, and artillery defensive fire tasks had been registered. The gun would be used to provide indirect fire support and was manned by Basie Riekert, Piet Pienaar, and Geoff Landsberg. Potential UNITA forming-up places for an assault on Soyo had been registered as defensive fire tasks for the D-30 and their range, bearing, charge, and barrel elevations noted.

Personnel from UNESCO and the World Food Programme (along with representatives from several oil companies) arrived in Soyo shortly thereafter to conduct a damage assessment and view the situation on the ground first-hand. Realising that they were in a combat zone, they were very keen to remain as close to my men as possible. They attended what became a regular joint briefing session during which they received our latest security assessment and in turn, informed my men of their intended movements. As someone later put it, it was a situation that could be likened to a soft 'NGO and oil companies' hand ensconced in an Executive Outcomes-FAA chain-mail glove.

It transpired, at these meetings, that some of the oil companies had been in close contact with UNITA—a strange situation indeed, as they were pumping Sonangol oil but liaising with UNITA. There was no need to guess where the profits were going.

Despite having been forced to withdraw from Soyo and redeploy their forces at Sumba, UNITA still posed a very real threat to the FAA-EO contingent in the Soyo area. With men and resources located across the north of Angola, UNITA could draw upon reserves in a relatively short space of time. In addition, they had men and material in reserve in southern Zaire.[132]

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The decision to drive UNITA from Sumba was jointly taken by Colonel Pepe and Lafras. The advance would commence on 21 March. The men would have to move along a narrow dirt track to the main Soyo-Sumba tar road because the dense elephant grass and swampy terrain made vehicle movement across country impossible.

An AGS-17[133] automatic grenade launcher was mounted onto a DAF truck to give fire support to the men who would move on foot and clear the road ahead of the vehicle.

The DAF was driven by Jonathan Leach, with Harry Carlse manning the AGS-17 and Phil Smith, Louis du Preez, Chris Papenfuss, Cornel 'Tallies' Taljaard, and Lukas Coetzee on foot, controlling the FAA troops.

DAF truck with twin 23mm guns for ground support at Soyo (photo: unknown)

As the DAF and the foot patrol left the base and slowly made their way down the dirt track leading out of town, they drove into a large, well prepared, UNITA ambush. Phil and Tallies were hit by deadly enemy cross-fire during the ensuing firefight.

Despite the massive volume of incoming fire, Chris desperately tried to resuscitate a mortally wounded Phil, but he died in Chris' arms minutes later. Under heavy fire, Chris bravely dragged Phil's body back to the DAF. Still under heavy fire, Jonathan loaded Phil's body onto the vehicle. Frantic attempts were made to find Tallies, but in vain.

To avoid being over-run by UNITA, the men made a desperate bid to withdraw from the killing ground, leaving everything but their personal weapons behind. The truck and Phil's body were also left behind in the killing ground.

Angry, shocked, and stunned, the survivors returned to Soyo, not knowing what had happened to Tallies, and expecting UNITA to launch another attack.

This was an omen of things to come.

When Lafras reported our latest fatalities I was overcome with a great sadness. Phil had served with me years before in 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing. Although I had not known Tallies, his presumed death also hit me very hard. But I had no time to mourn the dead. No matter how crass it appeared, I had to be concerned with the living. Lafras intimated that the casualties had caused a substantial drop in morale. Many of the men had shed more than a single tear. Both Phil and Tallies had been good and competent soldiers, well-liked by everyone who knew them.

That evening, Harry Ferreira and a local Methodist minister accompanied me to Phil's home where I told his wife Fiona what I knew about his death. I asked Harry to inform Tallies' wife that he was missing, presumed dead.

Harry attended Phil's memorial service a few days later—I could not leave the office in case Lafras tried to contact me—but more than that, I was afraid of breaking down during the service. Phil's death hit me harder than I could ever have imagined. My nerves had reached breaking point. Later that night I suffered what doctors later told me had been a mild stroke.

During the night, UNITA launched another counter-attack and the FAA line broke under their withering fire. As the line collapsed, the young Angolan army recruits fled to the only place they considered safe—beside and behind my men. Several of the FAA troops threw their rifles away during their panic-stricken retreat and were unable to help counter the UNITA assault. Sobbing and crying, they were of no help to my men who were fighting for their lives.

Lafras and Crause Steyl clambered aboard Crause's aircraft and hurriedly took off into the night. Once airborne, Lafras acted as an airborne artillery observer and called in D-30 artillery fire on the registered defensive fire tasks they had planned earlier. The D-30 pounded the area, breaking the UNITA assault and forcing them to withdraw. My men, however, kept a watchful eye for the rest of the night, expecting UNITA to mount a penetration night attack that never came.

A UNITA soldier involved in the ambush was captured the following day and the grisly manner of Tallies' death was revealed. He had been captured, gravely wounded but alive, and then tortured to death over several hours. In an attempt to further demoralise the men, UNITA broadcast his screams over the HF radios. Some of the men listened to this broadcast in angry silence.

Over the next few days, the oil companies hastily recovered whatever equipment they could. My men were kept busy with the routine tasks that EO had been contracted for in the first place—airfield and harbour security, perimeter patrols, and guarding the recovery teams. The defensive positions in Soyo were also strengthened along with ammunition stacking to ensure they would be able to mount a sustained defence when the inevitable UNITA attack took place.

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On 24 March, I tried to raise Lafras on the satellite phone to give him a bit of a morale booster—I had received feedback from Special Forces that the D-30 artillery

bombardment had killed more than 53 UNITA troops and wounded many more.

I was unable to raise him.

I sensed that something terrible was about to happen—and my nerves were stretched to breaking point.

On 25 March, Geoff Landsberg, who had by now been casevaced and treated in South Africa, asked to return to Soyo and re-join his friends. He left on the next available aircraft, despite none of us knowing what had happened to the men. Harry Ferreira wanted to do the same, even though his wound had not properly healed, but I persuaded him to stay behind and assist me as I was exhausted. He grudgingly agreed.

For the next four days I had no communications with my men.

I feared the worst as all attempts to discover what had happened to them proved unsuccessful. Calls to Sonangol's offices in Luanda went unanswered. Buckingham's voice mail was on and I left countless messages which he never returned. Crause Steyl's telephone in Windhoek had also gone silent.

I confided to Harry Ferreira that I thought the men had either been killed or captured. I didn't discuss this with Colonel Baker and his investigation team as anything I said would have been speculation. I imagined how excited the media, MI, and DFA would be if they learnt that all my men had died in Soyo. The tension was unbearable and I feared I might suffer another stroke.

Continual calls from journalists wanting to know the situation in Soyo didn't improve my state of mind. I feared that perhaps they knew something I didn't but I wasn't about to give them the pleasure of hearing just how worried I was, or that I actually had no idea what had happened to my men.

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On 28 March, the phone rang. "Hi, it's JC speaking."

I couldn't believe my ears. JC Erasmus, an ex-Special Forces operator, was one of my Soyo team.

"Where the hell have you guys been? Is everything okay?" I demanded.

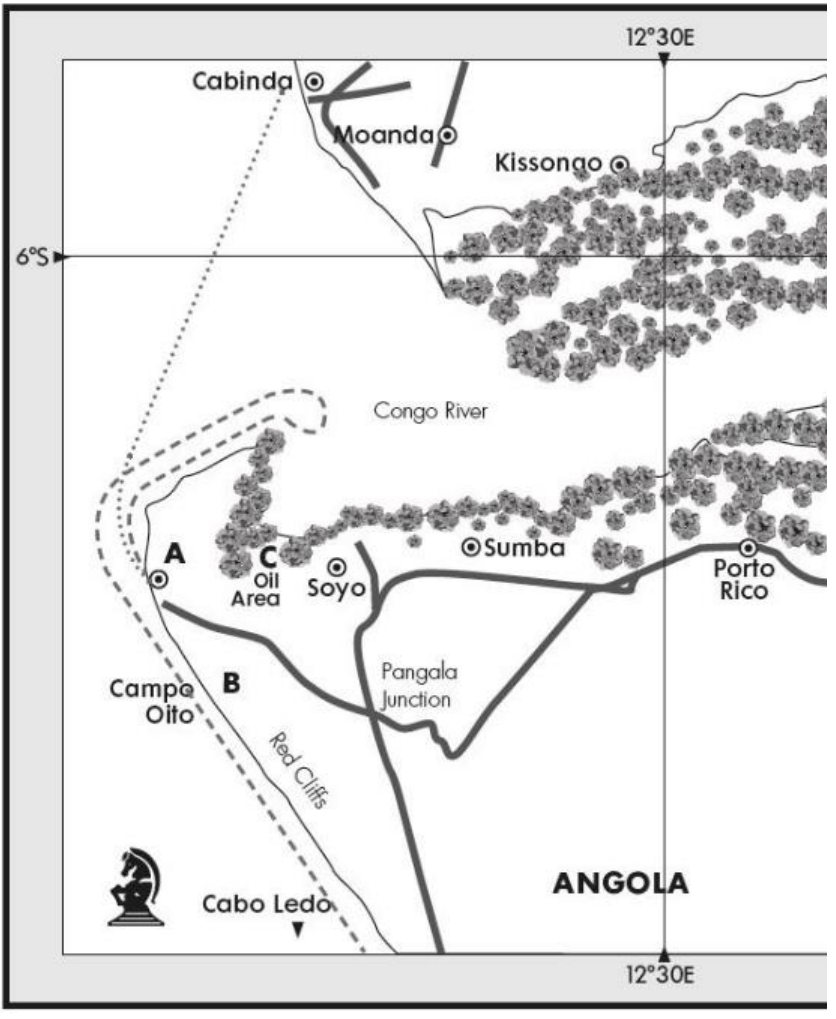
"We're all fine," JC responded, and chuckled when he heard my sigh of relief. "UNITA attacked and it looked like they were going to overrun the town and harbour so we got out of there. We understand that FAA managed to launch a counter-attack. They've recaptured the area so we'll soon be returning."

"Are you sure everyone's okay?" I asked.

"Yes, we're all okay. Four of the guys stayed behind but we hear from FAA that they're also fine. We'll be joining them later today."

I almost collapsed with relief.

JC went on to tell me that on 24 March, UNITA had launched a massive and well-coordinated attack against the FAA's outer defence lines which had rapidly collapsed as the FAA recruits broke and fled their positions under a devastating hail of fire.



Map illustrating capture of Soyo

A - Initial LZ : first objective
B - Second objective

C - Hotel in main objective
- Planned FAA amphibious assault
_ - EO heliborne assault

At about the same time, a Texaco vessel had sailed into the harbour, oblivious of the rapidly deteriorating situation.

As the FAA troops had come crashing through the dense bush, some without their rifles, my men knew UNITA were about to overrun Soyo. They had hastily packed up what equipment they could and implemented a spur-of-the-moment emergency plan, fighting their way back to the harbour area. Lafras and several of the men had boarded the Texaco vessel, ordered the captain to embark the men on the dock, and sailed to the mouth of the Congo River to wait out the deteriorating situation.

One of Crause Steyl's aircraft was still parked on the edge of the Soyo airfield and a hasty decision had been made to recover it. Piet Pienaar, Jonathan Leach, Harry Carlse, Louis du Preez, and one of Crause's pilots, volunteered to undertake this hazardous task. Despite having lost much ground to UNITA, a FAA group had successfully counter-attacked the airfield and regained a section of the road to Soyo. As soon as the airfield had been secured, the pilot had clambered into the aircraft— which had miraculously sustained no damage in the successive firefights—and taken off for Cabo Ledo and safety.

This had left the aircraft rescue team stranded in Soyo so they had attached themselves to Colonel Pepe's HQ. The commandeered Texaco vessel was then instructed to sail to Luanda, where the men had disembarked. From there, they were taken by vehicle to Cabo Ledo where they had waited for news on the situation. Plans had also been hastily formulated to rescue Harry, Piet, Jonathan, and Louis in case they had been captured by UNITA.

Our future in Angola was uncertain, to say the least. Lafras had committed an act of life-saving piracy and I was certain Texaco would not allow this to pass without comment. Given the negative publicity we had attracted in South Africa, I expected the worst from the American oil giant.

I knew that if the media got hold of the story, they would encourage the South African Police to put EO out of business and possibly arrest us all for international piracy. I was, however, immensely relieved that the men were fine and I couldn't have cared less about what they'd had to do to get out of Soyo. If there were going to be repercussions I would cross that bridge later.

I finally managed to raise Buckingham on the phone and told him what JC had told me. I voiced my concerns about Texaco trying to make capital out of Lafras's actions, but he told me to 'forget it' and said he would have a word with the 'good folks at Texaco'. Either he was true to his word or Texaco merely decided to forget the incident—I never found out—but I never heard another word about it.

Two EO members on guard at Soyo harbour, Angola, 1993

The situation in Soyo had once more been brought under control and the FAA had strengthened the defensive perimeter and reinforced their troop levels.

My men flew back to Soyo to resume their duties and the oil companies worked on removing their equipment with a renewed sense of urgency. Buckingham told me over the phone that he was delighted at the way my men had conducted themselves.

With the contract nearing its end and our job having been done, the men started returning to South Africa in small groups of four or five.

Nico Palm had offered to help me wherever he could as he was no longer working for Armscor. I gratefully accepted his help and he began ferrying the returning men from the airport to my home/office.

Waiting to debrief them as they arrived was the SAP investigation team.

By now the investigating officers knew what had happened and why, thanks to the daily feedback I had been giving them. They nevertheless had to take statements from every member, and this evidence would determine whether Executive Outcomes was to be prosecuted.

One of the investigating officers remarked, "You ought to realise that you have severely hurt and disrupted UNITA and in the process probably damaged some very lucrative business deals that were being run from South Africa. They probably thought you'd buckle and cancel the contract with Sonangol if they put pressure on you. If ever you want to attempt something like this again, think carefully—you could be in a lot more trouble next time."

I took note of his warning.

Larney Keller, who had introduced me to Buckingham, decided to call it a day. He said he would rather pursue a career outside of security and military consultancy and not have to contend with the media or MI and the DFA on a daily basis.

"If you are prepared to deal with that type of bullshit, good luck to you," he said as we parted company. I never saw Larney again.

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We all mourned our comrades and friends who had died or been wounded during the execution of that task, and I, in particular was extremely bitter about the manner in which the media (wittingly or unwittingly) had placed my men in danger by arguing the case for UNITA both in South Africa and internationally.

Whatever did or didn't happen in the future, the label of 'mercenary' would stick to us forever, but by then I was beyond caring. And strangely enough, it was this tag that would attract governments in need and men from around the world, wanting to seek employment with the company. After giving every man an additional bonus and covering all expenses, my bank balance reflected the paltry amount of US$8 000. Buckingham was gracious enough to tell me to keep the remaining funds. He felt I deserved something for having kept the show on the road.

But Soyo had cost much more—several men had been wounded and three had been killed. These were losses that money could never compensate. I will never forget them.

Nor will I forget that a small group of men had doggedly refused to save their skins by forsaking their mission. Their selfless courage and determination had unwittingly laid the groundwork for our future in Angola.

They were the true heroes of Soyo.

09:
The Investigation

Both Executive Outcomes and I had become targets for the pro-UNITA lobby (both within and outside South Africa)—a campaign relentlessly driven by MI, DFA, and the media.

It was hunting season with no restrictions. The truth was ignored in favour of imaginative journalism and disinformation. What was supposed to have been a straightforward security task, albeit in a high-risk area, had become a focus-point for anger, malice, hypocrisy, and lies. No doubt, it also had an adverse impact on several illegal business transactions.

EO was forced to change its business profile. Previously registered as a management consulting company that conducted training for Special Forces, it was now to be a security-and-military training and advisory company that would, when necessary, engage any threat with fire.

We had been forced into a position that had already cost the lives, not only of some of my men, but also of the numerous UNITA troops that had been thrown against us as cannon fodder. I believed this was a high price to pay for the business that South African politicians and businessmen insisted on doing with a rebel movement despite UN imposed sanctions.

While I couldn't at that time identify all of the individuals who had stoked the furnace, I believed that some of the parties involved were corrupt National Party politicians who had been settled in their government easy chairs for some 45 years. They were best placed to manipulate Military Intelligence and the Department of Foreign Affairs—to say nothing of their lapdogs in the media. I did, however, suspect some journalists of being MI or DFA agents of influence and would, over time, confirm their roles.

Then there was MI's Directorate Special Tasks who had invested many millions of taxpayers' Rands into destabilising Southern Africa through UNITA[134] and several other so-called 'liberation movements'. It was not difficult to imagine what role they might have played in the campaign against Executive Outcomes.

The police investigation team ignored the media speculation and carried out their task to the letter.

Colonel Dave Baker led the SAP's investigation into EO's role at Soyo

Over the coming days, everyone who had taken part in the EO contract in Angola was questioned exhaustively. Statements were taken and facts were verified and cross-checked. Ironically, the media's sources of information were never examined to see what their agendas had been or why they had been so concerned about UNITA losing Soyo.

I had already made my own statement to the SAP investigation team on 16 March 1993, repeating everything I had told the media. The difference was that the police thoroughly investigated my story and made no attempt to make something out of nothing. My men were able to corroborate most of what I had said.

The investigating team took 72 sworn statements in total, which at least proved that I didn't have a 'hundred or so men' as some in the media had claimed. None of the men, of course, knew anything about the supposed plan to march from Soyo to Jamba to assassinate Dr Savimbi. If the journalists who had suggested that had simply bothered to look at a map to confirm the distance, danger, and terrain, they would have known it was nonsense. Sadly, it appeared the South African and international public were equally ignorant of how impossible such a mission would have been.

The police investigation was given the case number Pretoria Central MAS 698/3/93. Our alleged transgression was that we had contravened section 12 1A of the Defence Act, 44/1957. The completed police docket, I was told, would be submitted to the Attorney General, who would decide if grounds for prosecution existed.

Various journalists called and asked me for progress reports on the investigation. Several seemed to be hoping that I was already locked up.

On the other hand, I also got several encouraging calls from serving senior SADF officers. I particularly appreciated the call I got from Brigadier Deon Ferreira, my former commanding officer at 32 Battalion.

"Echo Bravo, I don't care what anyone else says—I think you did a great job running the show and keeping things together. I'm proud that we once served together."

Not too bad for a sapper, I thought to myself.

I was very grateful to him for the compliment, although the credit for the Soyo operation ought to have gone to the men who were there. My role had merely been that of

a ‘back room boy’.

In early April, I asked the police team why they were still investigating my company when, by their own admission, we had broken no South African laws. They had always been courteous, but I was getting frustrated by their presence at my house.

“We have been instructed to continue this investigation by the Commissioner, General Johan van der Merwe,” Captain Riaan Bellingham told me.

“But why?”

Major Ras responded: “All we know for sure is that massive pressure has been brought to bear on General van der Merwe to find evidence that will shut you down— forever. As it is, there are already complaints about us taking too long to finalise this matter. MI and the DFA are demanding answers, as are a few members of cabinet. The media is also checking in almost every day, trying to find out what progress we’ve made. They all seem to want to make sure that you will never do anything like this again.”

It struck me as strange that, despite South Africa officially having declared an end to its undeclared war in Angola in the late 1980s, our politicians and military still seemed determined to replace the government in Angola with the Maoist megalomaniac Savimbi and his UNITA. What greater plan did they have in mind, I wondered.

A few days later a very agitated Captain Bellingham phoned and demanded to see me. He was obviously angry, and when he arrived, I anxiously asked what the problem was.

“How well do you know Colonel JAB Swart of Special Forces?” he demanded. “He was my squadron commander in the Corps of Engineers at one time,” I said.

“He then moved to 1 Parachute Battalion and I bumped into him once or twice in Angola. He’s now the Senior Staff Officer Counter Intelligence for Special Forces. I once sponsored him to go to Switzerland to attend a military event there. Recently he asked me to sponsor him again… for something or other… but I couldn’t. We certainly aren’t friends. Why do you ask?”

“He’s been pushing very hard to have you prosecuted,” said Bellingham. “He gave me eight very wishy-washy statements concerning the work your company did at Soyo. Has he got something against you?”

“Not that I know of,” I said. “Maybe he’s angry with me for not wanting to sponsor him again. When he asked me we were just getting into the Soyo task. He said he would help to ‘decriminalise’ Executive Outcomes if I sponsored him.”

“So, why would he say that?” Bellingham inquired.

“I have no idea. I wondered about it because we haven’t committed any crimes— or have we?’

“I don’t know if you are aware of this, but he has told us you are an agent working for Britain’s MI6 and a threat to the security of the state. Are you?”

“I’ve never been an agent for any foreign intelligence service,” I replied angrily. “Tell him I say he’s a fucking liar and I’m willing to take a polygraph test to prove it. Will he do the same?”

“I don’t know. He seems to believe what he says.”

I was furious but I could see that Bellingham was watching my reactions carefully. I merely shook my head at Swart’s allegation. He was grossly abusing his position of trust

in Special Forces to sow distrust—whether from jealousy or from anger about me not having sponsored him, I didn't know.

"Okay, I believe you," said Bellingham eventually, "but if I ever discover that you are a British agent—and we will definitely find out if you are—I'll personally see to it that you are locked away for so long you'll forget the sun."

I was seething with rage.

"I have to go," Bellingham said, looking at his watch. "Thanks for your time and the coffee. Also, watch your back"

Then he smiled and said, "I think you should know that Swart has also told my superiors I'm on your payroll."

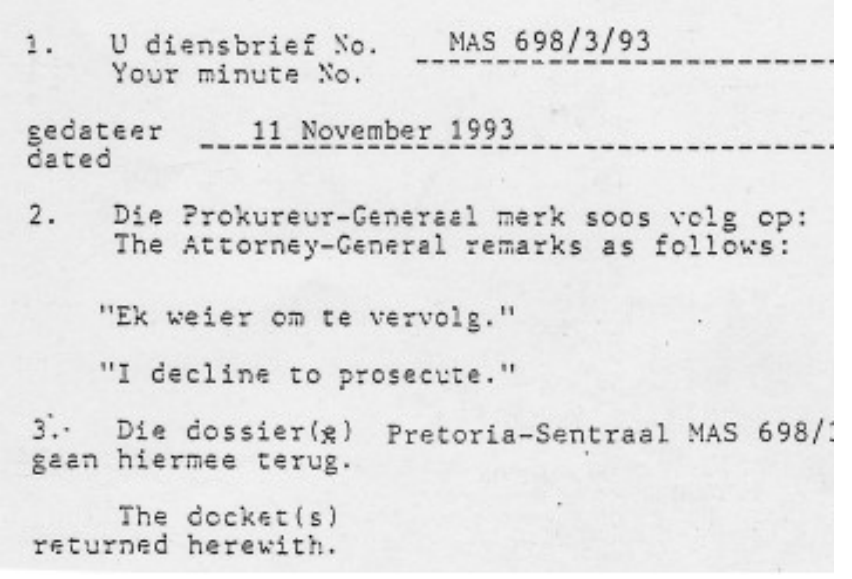
It was apparent that Swart was determined to shut EO down. If he couldn't, he would blame the investigating officers for having conducted a poor investigation or being in my employ.

The investigation was finally completed on 11 November 1993, and the docket was submitted to the Attorney General. Captain Bellingham included a summary of the events that had led up to the Soyo operation and all statements taken along with a brief synopsis of each. The investigating officers' comments and recommendations (translated from Afrikaans) were:

According to the investigation, no facts could be obtained that would establish a prima facie case. The security officers were paid between R500 and R1 500 per day. Mr Barlow, the owner/director of Executive Outcomes, was provided with funds by a British company which paid the money directly into the company's Standard Bank account (in South Africa). Barlow paid his security officials by cheque from this account.

The Attorney General's letter—reference PDS930801, dated 22 November 1993—addressed to the SAP Unit Commander, Counter Espionage and Crime Intelligence stated:

The Attorney General remarks as follows: I decline to prosecute.



1. U diensbrief No. MAS 698/3/93
Your minute No.

gedateer 11 November 1993
dated

2. Die Prokureur-Generaal merk soos volg op:
The Attorney-General remarks as follows:

"Ek weier om te vervolg."

"I decline to prosecute."

3. Die dossier(e) Pretoria-Sentraal MAS 698/
gaan hiermee terug.

The docket(s)
returned herewith.

Extract from the Attorney General's letter to the SAP's Counter Espionage HQ

While the police investigation and the subsequent decision by the Attorney General had vindicated us, the media and other players continued to label us 'mercenaries'.

On 25 November 1993 I issued a press release stating that the police had conducted their investigation and the Attorney General had found no grounds to prosecute either myself or the men who had partaken in the task at Soyo. The media promptly disregarded it, I suspected, because it clashed with the narrative they had been propagating.

After Soyo, Executive Outcomes disappeared from the headlines and I began trying to generate business elsewhere. This was more difficult than before as potential clients seemed to view me as an extremely undesirable character, thanks to the media's deception and lies.

I believed that perhaps the media, and its well-connected informants, had achieved their goal of isolating me.

Many years later, a police officer who had taken part in the investigation told me, "We could have used the money spent on investigating you to build hundreds of homes for the poor. We could have fed them as well."

The South African taxpayers were blissfully unaware of how their taxes were being squandered to protect those who were operating outside of the law. This would become even more apparent in the years to come.

Soyo and surrounds in 2007, several years after EO's visit there

10:
A Brief Respite

Soyo heralded a pivotal change in my life and in Executive Outcomes' future. It was also the forerunner of bigger things (and bigger problems) to come. For a start, I was about to become persona non grata with Special Forces due to my company's involvement at Soyo.

In early April 1993 Colonel Prinsloo phoned and said he wanted to discuss my company's future involvement in training Special Forces. Unusually, he asked me to go to his home instead of his office. I sensed what was coming but hoped I was wrong. "Man," he said with a laugh, smoothing down his bristling moustache, "you've pissed the entire establishment off. You seem to have forgotten that UNITA has some very powerful friends here. Within a matter of days you ruined the sense of invincibility they have been working on for years. A lot of people were expecting UNITA to win the war and become the new government in Angola and there was a lot at stake. I'm sure your untimely meddling cost them a lot of money—not to mention the casualties."

"We were led into a situation we couldn't turn back from. The guys on the ground had no option but to fight for their lives," I said. "The press played a massive role in forcing us into that situation—and some of my men were killed too. I will never forgive certain elements in the media for that. What was supposed to have been a very straight forward security task was escalated into a full-blown military operation. We hadn't planned that."

"I know. I've heard what really happened—but you should have known the media would only write what Savimbi's friends wanted them to—and those people aren't well-disposed towards you right now. I think they'd take you out if they could, so be careful… the name 'Cleary' keeps getting mentioned."

"The name doesn't ring any bells for me," I said.

"JAB Swart has also decided to charge the two surviving men[135] who joined your company for going AWOL. Obviously their careers will be destroyed if they are found guilty," he told me.

"But where does this fondness for Savimbi and UNITA come from?" I asked. "I know we originally supported him, apparently to stop the Soviets, Cubans, and East Germans from gaining control of Angola and Namibia…and because we thought they might be after the Cape sea route. But aside from the irony of a Maoist government in Angola being more acceptable to our politicians than an African socialist one, the South African government recognised the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola several years ago. It also accepted UN resolutions not to support UNITA because they rejected the election results last year and went back to war. Hasn't the South African taxpayer supported this farce for long enough?"

"That's all true, but it doesn't mean our government—or any government—will ever stick to its word. You know that. It's always about money and power….oil, diamonds,

greed…corruption and influence will beat honesty every time. Anyway, I think you have a good idea why I wanted to see you."

"Yes, I think so."

"I hate to be the one to tell you. We are no longer going to use Executive Outcomes to train our operators. Brigadier Swart[136] is as upset about this decision as I am, but our hands are tied. The order has come down from the top and there's nothing we can do about it."

"I don't blame you, Colonel, and I understand. But how about telling me, in confidence, where that order originated."

"You know I can't divulge that as much as I'd like to. I'm just the messenger. I can give you one hint; start paying attention to which journalists are writing the crap about you. Also watch out for JAB Swart. He seems to have the knife in for you."

I appreciated what he was telling me. Someone high up on the military or political ladder was baying for my blood. His tip-off about certain journalists implied that some were still working under MI's control—something I was well aware of. As for Swart, this was the second time I had been warned about him.

"I must say," Colonel Prinsloo concluded with a smile as we shook hands, "you made a right fool of me when I tried to recruit you for the CCB. Well done. I was completely taken aback when your membership became public knowledge."

We parted on good terms. I liked Prinsloo and couldn't blame him for having terminated my services. He was, after all, merely the piano player—not the songwriter.

However, the sudden termination of my ad hoc agreement with Special Forces left me without a single client, and that made me determined to market Executive Outcomes even more aggressively. I just didn't have a clue how to go about it since the media had branded me and my company as untouchables. After what they had written, I didn't think anyone would want to do business with me.

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It was, at about this time, that FW de Klerk, South Africa's president,[137] disgracefully and treacherously ordered the arbitrary disbandment of 32 Battalion as though it was some disease-ridden corpse. Those of us who had served in the battalion were deeply angered by the way in which this inexcusable and shameful action was conducted. Having bled for the politicians, our beloved battalion was now being betrayed by them.

Marcus Flaminius, a Roman centurion writing in the 2nd century AD, summed up the way many of us felt:

We had been told, on leaving our native soil, that we were going to defend the sacred rights conferred on us by so many of our citizens settled overseas, so

President FW de Klerk, the man responsible for dismantling the SADF to appease the ANC

Many years of our presence, so many benefits brought by us to populations in need of our assistance and our civilisation.

We were able to verify that all this was time, and, because it was true, we did not hesitate to shed our quota of blood, to sacrifice our youth and our hopes. We regretted nothing, but whereas we over here are inspired by this frame of mind, I am told that in Rome factions and conspiracies are rife, that treachery flourishes, and that many people in their uncertainty and confusion lend a ready ear to the dire temptations of relinquishment and vilify our action.

I cannot believe that all this is true, and yet recent wars have shown how pernicious such a state of mind could be and to where it could lead. Make haste to reassure me, I beg you, and tell me that our fellow-citizens understand us, support us and protect us as we ourselves are protecting the glory of the Empire. If it should be otherwise, if we should have to leave our bleached bones on these desert sands in vain, then beware of the anger of the Legions.[138]

I had now suffered a double betrayal: two of the units I had served in—first the CCB and now 32 Battalion—were suddenly gone. Shamefully, both units had been tarred and feathered by the media; the former because of a few rogue elements who should never have been there in the first place, and the latter for doing its job as a military unit—perhaps too well.

After the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 in 1989 (which brought independence to South West Africa)[139] 32 Battalion had been rudely resettled in the small, dusty, and isolated Northern Cape asbestos-mining town of Pomfret to deal with an armed conflict that had broken out between the ANC's armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (and its surrogate, United Democratic Front) and armed units of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). 32 Battalion was a professional fighting unit that never took sides and never favoured any political group or tribal affiliation— instead it served the Constitution and flag of South Africa.

Having served their adopted country with honour, 32 Battalion's Angolan soldiers and their families were unceremoniously dumped at the dilapidated mining town, Pomfret, by De Klerk and his cronies (photo: IOL.com)

The absurdity in the situation soon manifested. The men of the battalion, combat soldiers who had spent many years fighting on the battlefields of Namibia and Angola, were turned into a 'peacekeeping' unit without any preparation or training for their new mission.

Thrown into the rapidly deteriorating political situation in the sprawling black townships, the battalion soon proved itself able to carry out its orders, and it answered fire with fire—much to the consternation of both the ANC and the IFP. It appears this was exactly what President de Klerk and his Lance Corporal-Minister Roelf Meyer, were waiting for—a reason to sacrifice the battalion as a gesture of 'goodwill' to all political parties.

The fate of 32 Battalion was finally sealed at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and in 1993 a group of men, both black and white, who had readily sacrificed their lives for South Africa, were finally betrayed by the country they had so willingly served and died for. We were deeply bitter about this. I also came to realise that very few of our generals actually had any moral fibre or courage. The absence of their protestations was deafening.

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In April 1993 I was phoned by Colonel Joe Verster, my former CCB commander. "They have finally agreed to pay out the CCB pensions that are due. If you want to accept the package they are offering, you can. Obviously, it will be far less than you were originally promised and you will have to sign an agreement not to enter into litigation against the state to get what is truly due to you. Are you going to be yellow and accept their meagre offer, or will you join me and fight them?"

"I'm sorry but I can't afford a legal battle with the state right now. I need to do whatever I can to survive. I'm just going to take whatever they offer me and forget I ever served the bastards."

In Verster's eyes, this was a cowardly move; In my eyes, I had taken the only sensible route I could. I had neither the money nor the resources to fight the state.

A few days later, following instructions given to me, I drove down a desolate road south-west of Pretoria where I found a caravan under a tree. There were several cars parked nearby and I recognised a number of ex-soldiers who I was unaware had also served in the CCB. Lafras Luitingh was one of them.

When the name Oliver Johnson was called, I went to the caravan to receive my meagre pension pay-out. I also signed away any prospect of further monies and indemnified the state against damages.

The more than £220 000 (approximately R1 375 000)[140] I was owed—a great sum of money then—was conveniently forgotten by the government that had made us so many false promises. Several years later, General 'Witkop' Badenhorst told me that the money had indeed been paid in full. Someone else had pocketed it.

"What are you going to do now?" Lafras asked.

"I'm so disgusted by how we've been treated that I'm itching to approach every government against which South Africa has supported a militant opposition, and asking if I can train their armies to defeat South African-supported forces. Maybe that way I'll recover the money they owe me."

It was a throwaway comment.

I never imagined it would materialise.

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On 20 April 1993 I was phoned by someone who identified himself as General Faćeira.

"Senhor Barlow," he said, "we would like you to come to Luanda to talk about training our army."

Somewhat taken aback by the call, I played for time, trying to hide my surprise and excitement.

"I can't talk right now, I'm in a meeting, General. Can I call you back later?" I said.

I didn't have a clue who General Faćeira was and I wanted to find out before discussing anything with him.

"No, no, Senhor, I will call you back. What time must I phone you?" "Can you make it tomorrow at say, 10:00 Angolan time?"

"Si, I will call then."

My mind was racing. What if this was some sort of set-up designed to lure me into Angola for the purpose of exacting retribution for the damage my company had done to UNITA at Soyo? Who was Faćeira? Who did he report to?

I was sure that no one in South Africa would be willing to help me find out what I needed to know. Then it occurred to me that Tony Buckingham would quickly be able to verify General Faćeira's identity via Joachim David of Sonangol. I phoned him and explained the situation and my concerns to him. He called me back a few hours later.

"It should be okay to talk to General Faćeira," he said. "Joachim David thinks he is the chief of ground forces in Angola. There is another Faćeira as well—the chief of Special Forces."

"Ok, he promised to call me back in the morning."

"Do you need help with anything else?" Buckingham enquired.

Given Buckingham's access to the Angolan government via Sonangol, I felt I needed someone who knew his way around the Angolan halls of power. If the call was indeed a genuine request to assist the FAA, I would need someone on my side. Additionally, it would be to Buckingham's advantage (and this would be true for all the oil companies working in Angola) if the war came to a speedy end so that they could pump oil without interference from UNITA.

"Well, as you probably know I don't have a friend in the world down here. If this turns out to be something important, can I give you a call?"

"Of course you can. I'll wait to hear from you."

I immediately arranged a meeting with Colonel Baker and Captain Bellingham from the SAP team that had investigated EO. I wanted some sort of assurance that I wouldn't be breaking the law if something came of the call from the Angolan general. I knew the media would attack me no matter what I did, but this time I would approach the project in a completely different manner—or so I thought.

My meeting with Baker and Bellingham was brief and to the point. "If I am offered a contract by the Angolan army, can I accept it?" "That depends on what you want to do for them," Baker replied. "Will I be breaking any laws if I help train their army?"

"The short answer is a definite 'No'. This government cannot stop you from accepting a contract from another government," responded Colonel Baker. "As long as the contracting government does not involve you in any criminal activities here, we can do nothing about it. If you break any laws in their country, it will be up to them to deal with you."

"Great, that's all I wanted to know."

Back at my office, my mind raced through the possibilities.

If the Angolan army wanted me to put together a training programme for them I would accept the challenge. However, I was reasonably sure they were looking for rather more substantial involvement. I also had assurance that whatever they were looking for, I wouldn't be breaking any laws. I started making a list of the conditions I would insist on before making any kind of commitment. If they were not willing to accept my terms it would be a no-go right from the start and I would walk away from their request.

At the top of my list was a single word: Intelligence. I viewed intelligence as the lifeblood of any realistic and credible strategy.

Furthermore, without intelligence, I had no assurance of my own safety, let alone that of my men. I also knew that the threats that had arisen as a result of our involvement at Soyo would not simply die down and be forgotten. This time I was determined to expose the duplicity, hypocrisy, corruption (and I suspected, criminal activities, hidden under the blanket of officialdom) that was rife within the South African establishment and their dealings with UNITA.

With good intelligence, I would also be able to predict and pre-empt any actions coming from the media and UNITA. If that meant engaging UNITA—who were now firmly 'the enemy' in my mind—in direct combat, well, so be it. Even more important to me was that with good intelligence I would be able to identify South African MI and other agents working in the media and expose them for what they were. The same went for those

members of the South African government and armed forces still working and trading with UNITA behind the scenes.

That night I could hardly sleep. My mind ran through so many options that it would not switch off. I couldn't wait for the telephone call from General Faćeira.

It finally came the next morning.

"Senhor Barlow, will you come up to Luanda to meet with us?" he asked.

"I would be glad to meet you General, but not in Luanda. We can make arrangements to meet in a neutral area, possibly London or Windhoek."

I didn't want to be tripping over MI and their friends in the media while meeting an Angolan general.

"Who is 'we,' Senhor?' he asked.

"Myself and some of my associates. I would also like Senhor Joaquim David of Sonangol to be present as I am sure there will be some issues we need to clear with him." Given that Sonangol had guaranteed our funding for the Soyo task via Buckingham I felt it prudent to include them in the meeting with the FAA. I also wanted someone to be held responsible for any payments we might require should we be favoured with a contract.

"That's fine. When will we meet? It is very urgent." "I'll be in touch soon, General."

Faćeira gave me a telephone number to call in Luanda, Angola, when I was ready.

I immediately called Buckingham again and told him what the gist of my discussion with Faćeira had been.

"So, what do you want to do?" Buckingham asked.

"Well, as I'm now regarded as a 'rogue-soldier-and-criminal', I would like you and Joaquim David to attend the meeting with me. I trust you both, so it will be nice if you can be there to help with the financial guarantees. I don't know how much money the Angolans have. Besides, no international financial institution will advance funding to the Angolans given the present uncertainty in the country so with you both there, I have someone to look to for help."

"Okay, I will be in Windhoek in two or three days' time anyway—I'll give you a call from there."

Three days can feel like an eternity, especially when one has no income. Buckingham was true to his word and called me from Windhoek.

"I'm flying into South Africa this afternoon. Let's meet at the Sandton Hotel at about seven this evening. Joachim David is with me—we can discuss the situation over a drink."

"Perfect. I'll bring Lafras Luitingh and Harry Ferreira along. If anything develops I would like them involved…they are both good men. We'll probably have half the South African intelligence community following us so try to find a place where they can all sit comfortably while they eavesdrop."

"Great, I'll see you then," he laughed.

I immediately called Lafras and Harry, told them about my discussions with General Faćeira, the SAP, and Buckingham, and asked them to meet me at my house. Both agreed to come to the meeting. They were as excited as I was.

That evening, the five of us met as arranged.

After the formalities were over, we discussed the possible reasons for General Faćeira's interest in me. Joaquim David was certain that the general was going to ask me to put together some sort of assistance package for the FAA but it was all speculation and we couldn't get much further. We weren't even sure which General Faćeira had spoken to me. Both Buckingham and Joachim David, however, came up with options for possible funding if the FAA were keen to engage Executive Outcomes and needed financial assistance.

"Okay," interjected Buckingham. "Why don't you, Lafras, and Harry come along to the Seychelles with me for a couple of days—Joaquim David will be flying off to Luanda in the morning. We all deserve a bit of R and R[141] after Soyo," he said, puffing away at his Cuban cigar.

"Why not, I'm bloody tired and still trying to recover from my stroke. Harry and Lafras could use a decent break as well."

Joaquim David was asked to find out which Faćeira I had spoken to and to arrange a meeting with him.

"Why don't we meet at the Etosha National Park in Namibia? It's quiet and we won't be disturbed. If we catch anyone eavesdropping, we can always feed him to the lions," Buckingham suggested.

I readily agreed.

The Seychelles was exactly what we all needed. Between swimming and lazing around, we found the time to discuss the Soyo contract in detail. I noted the lessons learnt and other points I thought would be important if we were asked to return to Angola. Buckingham left the Seychelles a few days before we did, and went back to London to coordinate the meeting arrangements with Joaquim David. He promised to stay in touch and keep me informed of their progress.

By the time Lafras, Harry, and I left the Seychelles, we felt rejuvenated, rested, and ready for anything the future might throw at us.

Buckingham called me the morning after we returned to South Africa.

"It's all set up. Meet me in Windhoek tomorrow and let's get the show on the road," he said.

The following day, the three of us stepped off the SAA flight at Windhoek, where Tony Buckingham and his suitcase-carrier, Simon Mann, were to meet us.

We were about to embark on the greatest adventure of our lives.

11:
Planning for Victory

It was fitting that Crause Steyl was chosen to fly us to the meeting with the Angolan generals as he and his ProPilot men had done so much for EO at Soyo. Their unarmed light commercial aircraft had flown countless missions to resupply the men and casevac the wounded, often braving UNITA ground fire to lend support. The men who had partaken in the Soyo operation had nothing but praise for ProPilot.

Crause Steyl of ProPilot (photo: Liane Steyl)

The Namibian landscape unfolded beneath Crause's twin-engine King Air as we headed north. No one spoke much; we were all busy with our own thoughts, wondering what the meeting would hold for us. I repeatedly told myself that if I was offered a contract by the Angolans, my approach would be a far cry from what it had been in Soyo.

After what felt like hours, we touched down at a remote airfield at Namutoni in the Etosha National Park in the early afternoon. We were met by the owners and taken to a secluded lodge.

It was mid-May 1993.

The Angolan delegation was already there waiting for us.

Joaquim David introduced me to General Luis Faćeira (commander of the Angolan army's ground forces) and his brother, General Antonio Faćeira (commander of the Angolan Special Force Commandos). I realised it had been the former that I had spoken to on the phone. After exchanging pleasantries, we sat down for a drink and a meal.

General Luis Faćeira again thanked me for the work Executive Outcomes had done in Soyo. The Angolan army's high command had followed our battle for survival and were extremely impressed by the way EO had conducted itself, keeping such large forces at bay and withstanding continuous attacks without any support weapons or air support.

They also expressed gratitude for the way my men had rallied the fleeing FAA troops that had been thrown back by continuous UNITA counter-attacks. Most surprising to them had been the manner in which we had been able to maintain an effective logistical supply line from South Africa with only a few light aircraft.

I accepted his compliment but told him it had been men like Lafras and Harry that had actually done the work in Soyo. To them, all honours were due.

He then thanked me for trying to explain the Angolan position to the uninformed and misguided South African media.

I found this comment strange. My dealings with the press had focussed on Executive Outcomes, Sonangol, and Ranger Oil—not the Angolan government and its armed forces. I could only surmise that several of my comments had spontaneously bounced their way to Angolan ears.

"It's a pity that someone from your side didn't step forward to assist me with the raging controversy at the time," I said, "it would have made my life a lot easier. I ended up being everyone's spokesman and that wasn't my task."

"Yes, we're sorry about that. I'm sure you could have done with some help. And I am truly sorry that some of your men were killed in action," he said sympathetically. "After so many years of war, we in Angola understand death and know what it's like to live through hardship."

He went on to say that the Angolan General Staff, headed by General Joao De Matos (the supreme commander of the FAA) had discussed Executive Outcomes' role at Soyo with President dos Santos. The president had agreed to the possibility of my company retraining the army—or some elements of it.

Then he got to his point, reinforcing my belief that this was to be no idle chit-chat or debrief on Soyo.

"What do you think of UNITA?" he asked me.

"I believe that too many young South African soldiers died fighting a cause they never understood in order to bolster UNITA's image so that our country could access cheap diamonds, oil, ivory, and valuable hardwoods. Personally, I don't have any feelings towards them. However, if they want a fight, I am willing to give them one."

General Luis Faćeira didn't mince words.

"We are in desperate need of help," he said. "We have made many requests to the United Nations; all have been ignored. No one there wants to help us. UNITA caught us completely off guard when they returned to war after having lost the elections. We had, following the UN's mandate, demobilised many units, and that gave UNITA time to rearm and continue the war. They now occupy large areas of Angola. We asked the French to send troops to help us, but their defence minister is a staunch UNITA supporter. In fact, it appears just about the whole Western world supports UNITA and not the MPLA, which is the legitimate government. It's not an easy thing for any general to admit, but to be frank,

we are losing the war. We only control about 15% of the country; UNITA has laid claim to the rest. The war has torn us apart. This is not good for our government, our people, or our country. We need the war to end as quickly as possible so that we can start rebuilding. Would you be prepared to train our army?" I had been mentally prepared to discuss training some elements of the Angolan army, but this question took me by surprise. I realised I had just been dealt a hand in the greatest poker game I would ever play, and tried very hard to conceal my excitement. I had done some training for South Africa's Special Forces, and given some advice to the Pakistani Special Forces and a South American DEA; but I had never trained an entire army.

"Of course, you realise this will cause a lot more controversy than Soyo ever did," Buckingham said, chomping away on his cigar. "It's also going to piss the South African military and politicians off. They have their own agendas for wanting to see UNITA in power."

"Given the manner in which President de Klerk, his lily livered generals, and the once-mighty SADF betrayed us, I have no problem pissing them off as much as possible," I said. "In fact, after Soyo, I feel we owe it to them. I am, however, surprised at the UN's position…but unaware of any successes they can lay claim to in Africa."

"Does your company have any experience training armies?" the general asked, switching back to the business at hand.

"I think I can say it has some," I answered, aware that the work I had done had been on a much smaller scale than what he had in mind.

I briefly gave them an overview of my background as an SADF soldier and my training in offensive clandestine operations, small unit tactics, demolitions, and mine warfare. I went on to tell him that I had been trained to the level of battle group commander and understood the principles and application of mechanised and motorised warfare, combined land-air operations, air support, and other facets of conventional and unconventional warfare. I also briefly covered the work I had done in South America and Pakistan. I additionally discussed the importance of being able to negotiate from a position of strength—and pointed out that as things stood, UNITA held the upper hand. This situation had to be reversed if MPLA were to prevail. A decisive blow to UNITA on the battlefield could result in them calling for a ceasefire but we had to force an unconditional surrender if the effects were to be exploited. A conditional surrender would merely give UNITA time to reorganise and re-equip before returning to war. Faćeira nodded his agreement.

I then asked Lafras and Harry to give accounts of their military experience which they did.

"Yes, that's good, but have you ever fought in Angola—apart from Soyo?" the general asked.

"Yes, we all have, General," I answered, speaking for the three of us.

I went on to detail some of the operations that had been carried out by 32 Battalion and Special Forces.

Both generals were surprised but pleased to discover that we had once fought on opposite sides of the trenches. They believed our experience fighting the Angolan army would help us to understand its many problems.

They were astonished when I revealed that I had led the ambush at Cahama in 1982. Unbeknown to me, General Luis Faćeira had been the commander of the 16 Brigade based at Cahama at the time. He had also had, under his protection, a PLAN detachment[142] that had arrived from the north and was about to infiltrate Namibia. He added that their casualties that night and the following morning had been horrendous and that the brigade had existed only in name after that operation.

Between us, we dissected the entire Cahama operation and I revealed how both the infiltration and the exfiltration were conducted, the lessons learnt, and its aftermath. I would discuss previous battles with erstwhile enemies several times during the coming years.

By early evening I could see that the others around the table were starting to develop 'Oh, my God not more war stories' expressions. It was time to get back to the subject at hand.

"Okay," General Luis Faćeira said, "I accept that you are capable of retraining our army."

Then he looked straight into my eyes and asked, "But will you be able to make it capable of destroying UNITA on the field of battle?"

"General, the reality is that we can put together a team of men who will give your troops the best possible training in whatever fields they require. And yes, we can make them quite capable of destroying UNITA's military forces. But to achieve victory, you must be aware of your strong points and more importantly, your weak points. We can negate your army's weak points through good training and the correct equipment. But if you are to succeed against UNITA, it is important that you remember what Napoleon said on the subject: 'To achieve victory one must be ruthless'. Your commanders need to become ruthlessly efficient. "

I also explained to him how important it was that military will be underpinned by political will to triumph on the battlefield, and described the concept of relentless offensive action. He assured me that would not be a problem.

"We will need a lot of training in many different areas," he said. "If we fail now, UNITA will defeat our army and all will be lost."

"This is probably our last chance to save our country," added General Antonio Faćeira.

"Generals, defeating UNITA poses no problem. In fact, we have some old scores to settle from Soyo. From your side we need a firm commitment that you truly want to end the war—and we will need both political and military will to support and strengthen our efforts," I said.

"I understand that you are angry with UNITA for killing your men," said General Luis, "but that is not important to us. What is important is that when the war has been brought to an end, we will need to integrate UNITA's forces with the FAA. That will also be part of your contract."

"I'd be quite happy to help you do it," I said, "but won't UNITA have a problem with that?"

"Not if we have won the war," he said, and then asked, "Why are you so angry with your government?"

I explained, in detail, how the South African army and our political masters had betrayed us after years of loyal service.

They both looked a little startled at this and then General Luis said, "Their loss will be our gain—and possibly the salvation of our country."

"When can you start?" General Antonio asked me bluntly.

"General, I agree to help you, but this sort of thing cannot be planned in a few minutes. I'll need to go back to Pretoria and draft a concept proposal which I will forward to you. This will give you the opportunity to see what we intend to do and you can make your comments. Once I receive the concept proposal back with your notes, I'll draft a final proposal for approval."

"No, no, no—you don't understand," said General Antonio. "We are here because we are in muito [plenty] trouble. We need to know by tomorrow morning how everything will work. Can you draft a proposal now? We can still discuss it this evening; we need to take it back with us to Luanda in the morning. Our army is losing ground on all fronts and we need to end this war as quickly as possible. Also, we must tell General De Matos what we achieved in this meeting by tomorrow evening."

"Okay, let's cut through all the bullshit," Buckingham interrupted, "do you think you can do it?" he asked me.

"Of course we can do it. I just didn't think I'd need to plan and present a proposal to save a country within a few hours."

Turning to Lafras and Harry, I spoke in Afrikaans: "I'm in shit," I said. "I didn't bring a typewriter or even paper and I have no idea how I'm supposed to write this damn thing and present it in a few hours. Lafras, see if you can get me a notepad and some pens from the lodge owners. I'll keep the generals busy till you get back."

What I did or didn't do within the next few hours would have a significant effect on my company, myself, and the war in Angola. Admittedly, it did my ego good to know that to some extent I held Angola's destiny in my hands.

While I waited for Lafras to return with the pens and paper, I cleared certain critical aspects with the generals:

1. I required a free hand in choosing the men who would conduct the training. I didn't want any interference from FAA or the Angolan government, nor could I afford future misunderstandings on this issue.
2. If there was any shape, manner, or form of military threat against my men, we would be permitted to take whatever pre-emptive action we deemed necessary to neutralise the threat without my men or the company having to face any repercussions. This pre-emptive action would entail the use of whatever force was required—I was not prepared to allow a recurrence of the Soyo situation.
3. I would require a guarantee that none of my men would be prosecuted for any of the military actions they had performed during South Africa's war against Angola. This was essential because I intended to include many Angolan citizens who had fought

against the FAA as members of 32 Battalion, Special Forces, or Koevoet. Most had not seen their loved ones in many years and I wanted them to be able to visit their homes and reunite with their families without fear of arrest. I told the generals that these men had suffered the same betrayal as we had at the hands of our political and military masters, and I didn't want a repeat.

4. The Angolan armed forces would provide us with the equipment necessary to conduct the training. This included a full range of weapons, vehicles, armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, and ground-attack aircraft.
5. I would be given complete authority regarding the size and composition of the contingent within Angola—and I wouldn't accept any Angolan interference in the running of my company.
6. We would be provided with the logistical support and heavy machinery that we required to construct our own bases and ensure ourselves the necessary protection and flexibility.
7. Fees for the project would be paid three-monthly in advance. Funds would be replenished after the second month of each three-month cycle. This meant that if the Angolans defaulted, I would have a month's payment in hand with which to terminate contracts and get my men home.
8. All salary costs indicated were calculated on an 'after tax' basis and I would require Angolan income tax certificates for the company, my men and myself.

This would prevent us having to pay income tax in both Angola and South Africa.

9. I would establish my own intelligence network which would operate both in Angola and South Africa and gain information that would allow us to take pre-emptive action as and when necessary.
10. I wanted raw and inexperienced Angolan troops who would start with basic training as I believed older, more seasoned soldiers would have developed mind-sets and bad habits that would be difficult to change.
11. I needed the issues of immigration and passport control clarified. My men would all need valid passports, but I didn't want any time wasted on bureaucratic procedures when personnel were entering or leaving Angola.

I believed that my list of requirements would ensure that we received exactly what we needed, and that in future there would be no misunderstandings about who would be responsible for what. If my conditions were unacceptable or if they were not met, I would decline the assignment.

To my surprise the generals promptly agreed to all my requirements. They did, however, point out that some military equipment would be slow in forthcoming because the country was at war and funding to purchase military equipment was not always readily available. I understood and accepted this—we would do what we could with what the Angolans gave us.

While we were discussing all this, Tony Buckingham, Lafras, Harry, Mann, Crause, and Joaquim David listened intently without interruption. Joachim David made notes on matters he intended to discuss with the generals in private. It was only much later that I learnt how fortuitous it was that I had asked him to accompany the generals to our meeting.

A long night lay ahead of us.

Lafras, Harry, and I retired to a nearby table and sat down to start drafting the proposal. The table was too small to accommodate the three of us, so I asked Harry to join the generals and told him I would call for him when I needed him. He was also to listen to what the Angolans were discussing and give me any relevant feedback. I later asked Crause to assist us in planning our air movements from South Africa to Angola.

Sitting beneath a bare light bulb with jackals howling in the middle distance, I drafted what would become our company structure for the contract. It included infantry, armour, artillery, engineers, and so forth—all the components required to train an army.

In consultation with Lafras and Harry, I considered the critical components that would be needed to support the training. These included communications, intelligence, air support, logistics, medical support, catering, administration, and other elements that a training team would need to be able to field, sustain, and protect itself.

I told Lafras that I wanted him to take control of the field component while I would run the company and take the flak from the media, Foreign Affairs, and Military Intelligence. I would also interface with the Angolan High Command on campaign and battlefield strategy and planning when necessary, and run our intelligence section.

We were under no illusion about how vicious the assault from South Africa would be.

I then briefed Harry. I wanted him to act as my liaison officer in Pretoria. I also spoke to Crause and determined what he would require to fly in excess of 500 men into Angola, maintain our logistical lines, and provide us with a rapid medevac capability.

At midnight, I presented my plan to the generals. Lafras and Harry filled in where necessary. Again they listened without interruption.

I ended by saying, "We haven't yet had time to look at the budget, General. I will calculate the costs and then send the quote to you."

"No," said General Luis. "We need to know tonight how much money we need to end this war. We don't even know how these funds will be allocated to us. Tell us what it will cost for your company to spend one year in Angola and train our army." Joachim David nodded in agreement and I assumed the FAA would probably turn to Sonangol for financial support.

With that, it was back to the drawing board to calculate what the project would cost. In order to do this, we had to determine what each man's salary would be (after taxation in Angola), what it would cost to move him from South Africa to Angola and back several times as well as clothing and feeding him for twelve months, how much his leave payments would be, and what it would cost to treat him if he was injured or took ill.

I didn't want a repeat of the communications breakdown we had experienced in Soyo so I decided that we would purchase communications and radio support equipment in South Africa. Body armour we would buy from the UK. Medical requirements would be

sourced from South Africa. The list was seemingly endless as we game-planned each option. By 04:00 we were ready to present a basic costing for the project.

Exhausted and with minds numbed, we returned to the meeting area and I presented our hastily hand-written cost estimate to the generals.

They listened attentively and questioned me on certain aspects. Then without further ado, General Luis Faćeira accepted the proposal and costings and we left them to work out how and where they would get the money to pay my company.

We were finally called back and told that Joaquim David and Tony Buckingham would guarantee all funds and ensure they were paid into my company account as stipulated. The finance would be provided by Sonangol, and underwritten by Heritage Oil and Gas, and Ranger Oil.

The Angolans gave me a verbal one-year contract. In that time I would be expected to provide experienced soldiers who would train their army to do battle with UNITA and win. The contract was sealed with a handshake.

"When can you start?" General Luis Faćeira demanded as he shook my hand.

"I won't be able to make a move until the first funds have been credited to my company's bank account. Meanwhile, we will start identifying men and see what infrastructure needs to be put in place to support the entire project."

To this, all parties agreed.

I undertook to fax my company's banking details to Joaquim David and Tony Buckingham as soon as I returned to Pretoria. They needed to respond to the banking coordinates as fast as possible. With that, my proposal (handwritten on several pages of A4 paper) was accepted. Two copies were made of the proposal; one for FAA and one for Sonangol. The Angolan government would confirm in writing several days later and I would also re-settle the contract by shaking General De Matos'[143] hand at a later date.

Joaquim David, Sonangol's CEO guaranteed the funding of EO in support of FAA (photo: unknown)

Neither the Angolans nor Executive Outcomes ever reneged on this verbal contract, even though, at times, we had to put pressure on the Angolan high command to deliver the equipment that had been promised.

In retrospect, they did the best they could, despite the intense pressure they were under, on the battlefield and in the economic and political arena.

"You helped to destroy the 16th Brigade several years ago; now we want you to rebuild it for us," were General Luis' parting words.

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Back in Pretoria we began to identify and list possible candidates from all arms of the services. As soon as funds had been paid into my account, we would start interviewing and recruiting candidates. We focussed on men we had known during our time in the SADF; men who would be able to adapt to a new way of training and fighting.

I regarded Lafras' role in Soyo as pivotal and told him that—provided he proved himself during the training project—I would give him shares in Executive Outcomes. He happily accepted as he didn't have much to fall back on except a struggling restaurant.

At around that time, I received a call from Herman Walsh of Anglo American/De Beers. I had asked him to give me feedback on how the two men who had been placed under cover in Kimberly were doing. According to Herman, they were doing well but he had found running a covert operation more complicated than he had anticipated. I offered to assist him but he declined, citing resistance from his superior, Brigadier Ed Knoessen.

I thought Anglo American/De Beers were heading for a problem but I had no choice other than to let them get on with the operation as they saw fit.

After my discussion with Herman, I called on Colonel Andre Beukes of the South African Police. I had already cleared my company's involvement in Angola with the policemen who had investigated the Soyo project but I felt it wise to get a second opinion. Beukes confirmed that the proposed contract was perfectly legal under South African law.

"The Attorney General had no grounds for prosecution before so they certainly won't have any now. The MPLA is Angola's internationally accepted government, recognised as legitimate by the UN since the 1992 elections—it's not as though you are going to train the rebels. They are inviting you to go and help them—there's nothing illegal about that. You must understand, however, that some people in our government and business community may not want the war in Angola to end. There is too much money at stake. It's not going to be easy for you, no matter what you do."

"I'm willing to take that risk," I said.

With that, Executive Outcomes' role in Angola was firmly determined.

Lafras, Harry, and I continued identifying potential candidates for the contract. We also looked at possible suppliers for personal, medical, and signals equipment. Soon I was able to submit my initial requirements to the Angolan High Command— the balance of the equipment would depend on the men on the ground once they arrived in Angola, and the Angolans would be responsible for supplying the vehicles, helicopters, weapons, and ammunition.[144]

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On 23 June 1993 an article appeared in The Star[145] under Garner Thomson's by- line. It was headed, 'Angolan rebels buying arms from three countries' and it stated:

LONDON - UNITA still appears to be getting arms from South Africa. Many of the shipments are transited through Bophuthatswana.[146] The Catholic Institute for International Affairs based in London says that UNITA's overall strategy is to control all areas outside Luanda and to bring the economy to a standstill, creaming off assets— especially diamonds and oil, to fund further conflict and strengthen its own hand in negotiations.

I consulted the Receiver of Revenue's head office in Pretoria to find out what the tax implications of the contract would be for my company and my men. I didn't make a note of who I spoke to, but I was assured that we would be treated like any other taxpayer as long as we declared our income, obtained tax certificates from the Angolan government, and maintained transparent financial records.

On 17 July I flew to London to see an attorney friend of mine closely associated with the British government. I had not used him as a CCB agent, but I had maintained contact with him 'just-in-case'. I needed his opinion about whether we would be breaking any international laws.

"Good Lord, of course not. Several companies here in the UK are already doing exactly what you are planning to do," he told me. "Besides, as far as we are concerned, UNITA is walking a fine line between 'liberation movement' and 'terrorist group'. The law is quite clear as far as these things are concerned: working for a legitimate government is fine; trying to overthrow such a government for financial or other gain is a definite nono. Personally though, I would be careful if I were you. It's an open secret that your government is still

supporting Jonas Savimbi and his armed gangs despite the UN resolution."

As I was in London, I decided to visit Rex Knott, the managing director of a company called Tripaust Ltd. I had met Rex at COPEX some years before and we had maintained regular contact.

I asked him to supply us with body armour, laser range-finders, and other equipment, and he promised to do whatever he could, but warned me that the British government was loath to see British-manufactured equipment going to Angola. I asked him to take care of getting end-user certificates if the Angolan ones were not accepted, and he promised to look into the matter. The British government however, accepted the end-user certificates provided by the Angolan government.

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Back in South Africa, I asked Lafras to locate a reputable firm of attorneys and he introduced me to Wilna Lubbe of the firm Wilsenach, Van Wyk and Louw. We discussed

the legality of our contract with Wilna who also assured us that we would not be breaking any domestic laws.

We had her draw up a contract that each man would be required to sign upon agreeing to join the company. It incorporated a penalty clause to the effect that anyone caught discussing his role in Angola outside of the company would be liable for a penalty of R100 000.

I, for one, did not want anyone coming back and telling MI, DFA, the media, or UNITA what we were doing. I would not tolerate recklessness that could endanger the lives of my men.

In my absence, Lafras had also contracted Crause Steyl to ensure the men's flight arrangements to Angola. Crause would be using his twin-engine King Air aircraft to fly the men from Grand Central or Lanseria Airport to Cabo Ledo[147] (their destination in Angola) with a fuel-stop in Windhoek.

From there, the men would be deployed to the various training areas.

The Angolans kept me more or less up to date with their progress on the military front but it was obvious that the war was ravenously sucking in men and materiel. They were also looking for safe and suitable locations where training could be conducted. It was rather obvious that we couldn't do this in the middle of a combat zone.

Cabo Ledo was eventually selected to become our main headquarters for the duration of the contract.

On 23 July I received a letter signed by General Joao De Matos on a Forças Armadas Angolanas (FAA) letterhead. It read as follows:

Executive Outcomes Linwood Park Pretoria

Senor (sic) Barlow

Please now (sic) we accept your SECRET proposal for your contract.

I will soon send you a finance document of costs for which your job will be [to]:

- Reorganise FAA
- Restructure FAA
- Retrain FAA

Advise me on re-equipping FAA as a professional army.

Also you must make provision for the integration UNITA's FALA[148] into a unified Angolan Army.

Thanks for your contract. Good wishes,

Joao Baptista De Matos (Signed)

FORÇAS ARMADAS ANGOLANAS
ESTADO MAIOR GENERAL

FAA

General de Matos' letter appointing EO to assist and support FAA

A few weeks later the first payment from Sonangol/FAA was credited to Executive Outcomes' bank account at Standard Bank, Strydom Square, Pretoria, and our work began in earnest.

My home in Danny Street was to be used as our main rear headquarters and office. Lafras' home in the Pretoria suburb of Centurion would become our administrative, logistical, and signals centre.

We immediately started recruiting the men we had identified as potential instructors. They came from diverse military backgrounds and we needed to assemble and integrate them into a cohesive team.

Each man signed a 12-month contract and was assigned to his position in the company. I also began identifying potential agents who would be able to keep me informed of what was happening inside MI, DFA, and UNITA. I was determined to run agents, not only to help me stay a step ahead of those organisations, but also to provide me with battlefield intelligence from within UNITA's ranks. Knowing where our enemies were deployed and what their intentions were would ensure that we were able to complete our task well within the contract period.

I decided to name EO's South African-based intelligence-gathering capability 'Strategic Intelligence Group' (SIG). Although I alone would be recruiting and running agents, the name would give our opponents the impression that we were operating a large group of agent handlers and analysts.

As all intelligence agencies do, I intended to spot and recruit potential agents by whatever means possible—financial inducements, blackmail, threats…I would even recruit at gunpoint if necessary. Intelligence could save lives and if I was to neutralise the threats facing my company and my men, I would stop at nothing to accomplish this. I also decided to target MI to discover what they were up to insofar as EO and myself were concerned.

The men in the field would run their own tactical intelligence systems and gather intelligence within their areas of operations, responsibility, and influence. These tactical intelligence entities would be run separately from SIG, with their own deployed agents, sources, signals intelligence, radio interceptions, and direction finding.

By then Nico Palm had joined us. He had been fired from Armscor on corruption charges, been found guilty, and was awaiting sentencing (pending an appeal). Armscor's loss would be our gain; Nico came to play a pivotal role in Executive Outcomes. Apart from frequently acting as my sounding board, he was a brilliant administrator who knew how to find his way around bureaucracy—something we would well and truly need in the coming years.

Given our previous contract in Angola, we were under no illusions about the dangers we would face. We knew from experience that many would try to stop us, and we realised that the propaganda campaign against us would be vicious. It was also likely that, once they had developed their own momentum, lies and disinformation would become the order of the day.

Our expectations were soon to become reality.

Rex Knott, the MD of UK-based Tripaust Ltd (Photo Unknown)

12:
Preparing for War on Several Fronts

It was only once we started interviewing possible candidates for the task in Angola that we discovered how many had been betrayed by masters they had loyally served. We were approached by ex-SADF members, ex-Koevoet counter-insurgency policemen, and even ex-ANC MK members, many of whom only wanted to join because they had no income and desperately needed to support their families. Some felt they had a positive contribution to make towards ending the war in Angola. Others wanted to join because the art of war was the only vocation for which they had ever been trained. Some were so desperate, they told me, that if we didn't employ them, they would be forced into a life of crime.

I sympathised because I had been in a similar situation, but the thought of out- of-work soldiers turning to crime was frightening; these were all men who had been trained to kill.

Despite some journalists claiming the contrary, we never hid the fact that we were looking for good men who would be able to train the Angolan army. Lafras and I started drawing up what would become our training programme, later to be adapted and expanded by our men in Angola.

Our task was to train a new 16 Brigade, and get it combat ready to take the war to UNITA. We made provision for a 24-week training cycle but this was later revised and the timeline for training was reduced. The FAA needed men to replace mounting casualties on the front line as quickly as possible.

UNITA's withdrawal from the political process after their electoral defeat in 1992, and the fragmentation of the major part of the movement into militant groups, had spawned a renewed culture of civil war. The only solution was to decisively defeat UNITA's military forces on the battlefield. The MPLA and FAA believed that as long as UNITA had an armed force, it would remain a threat to the stability of Angola. As a government, the MPLA was left with two options: destroy UNITA's armed forces or be destroyed.

By early August 1993 we had recruited a substantial number of men. Lafras' house had become our Comcen (communications centre) and it was a hive of activity, with men arriving for interviews, vehicles bringing equipment, and omnipresent Military Intelligence agents hovering around trying to look inconspicuous.

Even the Danny Street administrative headquarters wasn't immune to MI agents, who stood around in the empty road trying to look casual. Their lack of professionalism bordered on the insane.

By 21 August 1993, the first group of men whose task, as the EO advance party, was to prepare the way for those who would shortly follow, was finally ready to leave for Angola.

I telephoned General Luis Faćeira that evening, told him that our advance party would be arriving at Cabo Ledo in a few days' time, and asked him to ensure that they were received without any problems and given an area in which to start planning their work.

Course	Subject	D
Basic Training	Musketry Fieldcraft Intelligence Physical training Military discipline Guards & sentries Platoon weapons Counter-insurgency operations Section operations Platoon operations Company operations	6
Special Training	Section and platoon leaders Driving and maintenance Battalion weapons Small unit tactics Brigade staff training Brigade administrative training	4
Corps Training	Special corps training (infantry, artillery, armour, combat engineers) Leader group training Battle handling	6 4 2
Integration Training	Brigade movement exercise Brigade offensive exercise Brigade defensive exercise Brigade admin area exercise	2

The advance party (commanded by Carl Dietz) arrived in Cabo Ledo without incident in Crause Steyl's King Air on 23 August. Carl was an ex-Special Forces intelligence officer and his task was to begin developing our tactical intelligence gathering capabilities within Angola. He was also to establish a liaison channel with the FAA intelligence organs to keep us up-to-date on their intelligence regarding UNITA. With him were a medic, a signaller, a logistics officer, and some former Special Forces operators. Some of the men were familiar with Cabo Ledo as they had used it as a transit area during the Soyo operation.

Following the long, bumpy, and cramped flight to Cabo Ledo, the men began to clean up the old Cuban air force base south of Luanda, and prepare it as the main reception, accommodation, administration, logistics and staging base.

Crause Steyl's King Air N123PW coming in to land at Cabo Ledo (photo: unknown)

A High Frequency radio communications link was soon established with Pretoria and the Comcen informed us of their arrival and the situation on the ground. Carl had roped in a few FAA officers he had met when he was in Soyo, and they were helping where possible. Cabo Ledo was soon restored to some of the glory of its Cuban days. Things appeared to be starting out smoothly.

Thys Pelser (an ex-SADF officer) was appointed as the administrative officer in charge of recruitment. Initially, he had to ensure that applicants had valid passports and his close liaison with the Department of Home Affairs served to expedite their passport application processes. Every applicant was also screened to ensure he didn't have a criminal background. The police were very helpful and gave us added comfort that no fugitives from justice would be able to seek refuge in the company's ranks.

Nico, in the meantime, made arrangements regarding payment of salaries while Lafras and I worked on finalising the various curricula for the training courses.

We got so many applications that our mailbox had to be emptied three or four times a day.[149] We even had applications from several women wishing to join the company. We

needed a secretary, so we hired Daleen Wiegmans, a secretary from the CSIR,[150] to assist us at Danny Street—neither Nico nor I were proficient with computers or typewriters.

Typical of the many letters we received was one from a serving soldier, begging for a position in the company. He was a black Angolan who had loyally served South Africa for many years and his letter was a stark reminder of the small regard that the SADF had paid to the welfare of its men. He wrote:

I would firstly like to apologise for intruding on your time, but it would be of my most sincere gratitude if you could take time to read my letter and help me with this small dilemma.

I am a staff sergeant who has served in various Special Force battalions. I served in 5 Reconnaissance Regiment and also in 32 Battalion. For the last eight years I served in 4 Reconnaissance Regiment, now known as 453 Parachute Battalion, under the command of Colonel JJ [Hannes] Venter.

During September I received my salary statement. It said I only had about R347.00 owing to me. I immediately informed Sergeant Andre August, the salary clerk. He put my query to higher authority in Pretoria. They answered that I had been overpaid since 1991 which was untrue. If I had indeed been overpaid, why had it taken two years to recognise and rectify this problem? Sergeant August told me that it was not true I had been overpaid.

I still have not been paid the money I am owed. I am first and foremost a husband and a father. I am the breadwinner of my family and now after serving my country dutifully and faithfully I have nothing left to offer my desperate wife and two hungry children.

I appeal to you as I have no other resources. Thanking you most sincerely,

Jose Domingos

Domingos joined EO shortly after that.

During the following months, we heard from, and met, many men like Staff Sergeant Domingos; men who had loyally served the SADF—or in some instances the ANC's MK—and been side-lined without compunction. To us, who they had served was irrelevant as long as they could prove themselves able. Politics, race, and religion were not criteria and it was therefore not surprising that we had men from all across the political and racial spectrum flocking to our ranks. As far as I was concerned, once they had signed our contract, they were our men.

I also received a call from Wessel Jordaan (ex-Special Forces) who asked to come and see me with a view to joining the company. Before he formally applied, however, he needed to get something off his chest.

He told me that he was a member of the ANC and wanted to know if his affiliation was acceptable to me. I assured him it wouldn't be a problem as long as he didn't use the company as a platform through which to promote his political beliefs.

Wessel became the first ANC member to join Executive Outcomes, but he was certainly not the last.

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The anticipated disinformation campaign was soon kicked off by the SADF Chief, Lieutenant General Georg Meiring in a press release issued on 10 September 1993:

I have information that there is an active campaign by an outside organisation to recruit members of the South African Defence Force, primarily the SA Army, for service in Angola. They are apparently being recruited to provide security services for a company in Angola. My information is that this is a cover for alleged mercenary activity. There were attempts of a similar nature earlier this year that were well publicised. To date a few members of the South African Army have resigned, apparently to accept contracts for service in Angola. I am diametrically opposed to this recruiting campaign.

Furthermore, in terms of article 121A of the Defence Act (Act 44 of 1957), a member of the Defence Force or the Reserve may not contract himself for service as a mercenary. This article is applicable to all members of the Permanent Force, the Citizen Force, the Commandos, National Servicemen, the Permanent Force Reserve, the Active Citizen Force Reserve and the National reserve. This is also applicable to all members between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five years. On conviction they can be sentenced to a fine of R5 000 or two years imprisonment, or both. Any person who tries to influence a member of the Defence Force to contract themselves for service as a mercenary can, on conviction, be sentenced to a fine of R10 000 or five years imprisonment or both.

It was telling that, despite all the resources MI had at its disposal, Meiring had been informed that we were recruiting men to perform 'security services for a company in Angola'. The threatening tone of his press release made it clear that he wanted to be in a position to discharge men from the SADF instead of allowing them to leave voluntarily and honourably. His perverted sense of self-importance was astonishing. Like so many other generals, he had stood by and watched de Klerk and Meyer decimating the SADF's combat units, so he could go to hell as far as I was concerned.

Meiring must also have had a very short memory. He appeared to have forgotten that men he was now quick to label 'mercenaries' had been used extensively to fight South Africa's border wars. Those mainly black Angolan and Namibian soldiers and policemen had taken hits on the battlefield and saved the lives of many white South African National Servicemen. Foreigners from the US, the UK, and France, had also served in several SADF units. This was truly a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Meiring's attitude raised more questions than answers: despite the massive support South Africa had given UNITA, a handful of men at Soyo had proven that UNITA could be defeated. I wondered what would happen if the FAA (which was currently losing the war) ended up defeating UNITA. Would anyone ask why it was that the mighty SADF had never succeeded in defeating FAPLA and bringing the war in Angola to an end? Surely parents would want to know why their sons had been sent to fight and die in Angola. I also wondered what would happen if the government and the SADF were forced to disclose how much taxpayers' money had secretly been spent on maintaining UNITA over several years.

General Georg Meiring led a campaign against EO based on fake intelligence, for which he would later have to fall on his sword.

Meiring's press release was published in The Citizen of 11 September 1993. In addition, the article claimed:

He (Meiring) was reacting to reports that former SADF Special Forces members were in or on their way to war-wracked Angola to be employed as a mercenary vanguard for the MPLA government's 'final onslaught' against UNITA.

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Around this time, we started experiencing administrative difficulties with Executive Outcomes' bank account. Incoming funds were taking longer and longer to be credited and I felt that the bank was generally handling the account in a slip- shod manner.

On 10 September I felt obliged to write a letter to Standard Bank complaining about the shoddy service we were receiving from one HH Coertze. The company's account had been with Standard Bank since 1989, had never been in overdraft and was, by the bank's own admission, a Category C account (in banking terms, highly rated).

It appeared that Coertze was deliberately mismanaging our account and ignoring our communications. Two days later, on 12 September, Rapport published an article written by De Wet Potgieter and headlined, 'Top SA soldiers lured to Angola by big money' (direct translation). It seemed to me that Potgieter was also doing someone else's bidding and that there was a possible connection to the bank.

On 15 September I again wrote to Standard Bank asking for a progress report on our numerous complaints.

The following day, Ingo Capraro, writing for Beeld, provided the first indication that someone in Standard Bank was leaking supposedly confidential banking information to the media, perhaps channelling it through MI. What Capraro wrote could not have come from any other source:

Ex-members of the Civil Cooperation Bureau are openly busy with a large scale recruitment campaign amongst members of the Permanent Force and Citizen Force to assist the MPLA government in its fight against UNITA. Approximately R8.84 million in US Dollars has so far been brought into the country to cater for average monthly salaries of R15 300.

The soldiers are officially recruited as 'security guards' but when the chief recruiter in South Africa made a recent presentation he said 'the aim of the project is war against UNITA'.

Capraro simply declined to mention that he was lying in his last paragraph.

I had also been warned by a newly recruited EO agent ensconced in MI that someone at Standard Bank was indeed passing them information relating to our account. Nevertheless, I had naively continued to believe that the bank would honour its proclaimed obligation of client confidentiality.

It was time to sort things out. Nico and I visited the bank and demanded to see the manager, who refused to meet with us. Instead we were foisted off onto a lowly clerk. Although trying to look important, the clerk was obviously somewhat nervous and, to his dismay, a copy of one of the newspaper articles on EO slipped out of a file he was carrying. With the extensive media campaign to vilify and 'criminalise' EO underway, both Nico and I immediately recognised the implications.

"What seems to be the problem with this bank?" I asked, "Why won't your manager speak to us?"

"There is no problem," stammered the clerk, obviously worried and anxious, but trying to act like a senior banker.

"How did the media manage to get our banking information?" Nico demanded. "I… don't know," said the clerk.

"Come on, if not from the bank then how?" pressed Nico. "We didn't give it to anyone," said the clerk.

I turned to Nico and said, "This man is obviously lying. I suspect someone in this bank passed the information to MI who in turn fed it to Capraro. So much for their claim of confidentiality. We're changing banks—right now."

'No, please don't move your account...it won't happen again," pleaded the clerk. "You are absolutely right; it will never happen again, and we will get to the bottom of this—I promise you," I said, ending the meeting and signalling Nico to

accompany me.

We stormed out of the Standard Bank and went into the First National Bank (FNB) on Church Square, Pretoria.

Nico, as was his custom, was immaculately dressed in a suit and the toecaps of his shoes were gleaming. I was wearing faded jeans, scuffed boots, and a short-sleeved shirt. The bank manager immediately assumed Nico to be a company director and probably took me for a driver.

"How can I help?" he asked Nico.

"We need to open a bank account fast," I replied.

"What sort of account?" he asked, obviously put out that the driver had butted in. Within minutes we had established an account and I instructed Nico to close the company's Standard Bank account and transfer all our funds to FNB immediately. I cannot recall the name of the manager at FNB but he was most helpful and undertook to assist us wherever possible. He also told us that South Africans were not allowed to hold US dollars in their bank accounts due to the stringent foreign exchange control regulations at the time, and referred us to the foreign currency division of the SA Reserve Bank. FNB never disappointed us, nor did they pass our confidential banking information to anybody.

The South African Reserve Bank was charged with monitoring the inflow and outflow of foreign currency and the Angolans were paying us in US Dollars. At the time, the rand was see-sawing up and down and I had no wish to lose capital through fluctuating exchange rates.

Mr Spies, the Reserve Bank official we met, was extremely helpful. He advised me to establish a similarly named company in the UK and use that entity to open accounts, as only foreign companies operating within South Africa could hold accounts in other currencies. A stipulation was that the British-based EO would have to submit its audited UK reports to the Reserve Bank annually.

When I returned to the office I phoned a friend in the UK and asked him to establish a company under the name, 'Executive Outcomes Limited'. It was, within a very short space of time, incorporated in terms of the UK's Companies Act 1985.

Within a few days Spies asked for a meeting with our FNB bankers and ourselves, and provided the authority that would allow us to establish a variety of foreign currency accounts jointly held by the RSA and UK companies. This provided us with the necessary financial flexibility to be able to conduct what were often very tricky financial transactions with the Angolans. The doors of the Reserve Bank and FNB were always open to us and despite the media's continuing outcry about our 'illegality and financial irregularities', they were always willing to assist when we needed help or advice.

I also wrote a letter to CM van Niekerk, the manager of Standard Bank, Van der Walt Street, Pretoria. I reiterated my complaints about the bank's lack of service and the cavalier manner in which it handled client confidentiality, and also demanded to know how details from EO transactions had found their way to the media.

Van Niekerk never bothered to respond. Instead, he submitted a report to the Reserve Bank alleging irregularities in the way we had managed our account. The Reserve Bank immediately informed us of these allegations and suggested we close our account as soon as possible. This was sooner done than said.

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Meanwhile, my concerns about De Beers' ability to successfully run a covert operation were realised on 19 September when the Sunday Times ran an article headlined, 'De Beers' diamond 'spy' tells of sting'.

It appeared that problems had developed at De Beers' Koffiefontein mine in the Kimberley area where the men I had introduced to Herman Walsh had been involved in an Anglo-American undercover operation[151] mandated to investigate diamond theft, security breaches and leaks. Referring to testimony provided by Jim Ross, the article said that 'he and another agent, Mr Len Struwig, had been approached by Pretoria businessman, Mr Eeben Barlow, who had been acting on behalf of Mr Herman Walsh, Anglo's chief security engineer, and Brigadier Ed Knoessen, security consultant for Anglo.'

It did not take the media long to besiege me with accusations about only having agreed to assist FAA because of the diamonds in Angola. Several of them even tried to get me to confirm their misguided belief that EO was secretly working for De Beers in Angola.

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While this was happening, the UN, through its Angolan Verification Mission (UNAVEM II), was trying to monitor the breakdown in negotiations that had occurred after UNITA's rejection of the election results in 1992.

The UN had originally established the Angolan Verification Mission (UNAVEM I, charged with verifying the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola) after the New York Accord had been signed by South Africa, Cuba, and Angola in December 1988. On 30 May 1991, on the UN Secretary-General's recommendation, the Security Council had adopted resolution 696, giving UNAVEM (thereafter UNAVEM II) a new mandate that was supposed to have lasted for seventeen months, until the general elections in late 1992.

On 15 September 1993, the UN Security Council adopted its Resolution 864 of 1993 which extended UNAVEM II's mandate for an additional three months. The UN also undertook to expand its presence in Angola if peace was restored.

When our men began arriving in Angola, the UN monitors were still there.

UN monitors had been deployed to five centres in Angola: Luanda, Lubango, Namibe, Benguela and Sumbe. The feedback we were getting from Cabo Ledo, which mainly came from what FAA members had told our men, hardly showed UNAVEM II in a favourable light. Despite its presence, there was continuous fighting between the FAA and UNITA and civilian casualties were growing at an alarming rate. Our men had no doubt that the UN was turning a blind eye to UNITA's activities while condemning every action taken by the FAA.

Photographers clamour to get a photograph of their favourite Maoist, UNITA's Dr Jonas Savimbi (photo: unknown)

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The first men had scarcely left South Africa for Angola when the media, once more quoting 'undisclosed sources', launched a renewed assault against us, claiming that we were about to spearhead the FAA's advance on Jamba. Although this accusation wasn't new to me, I couldn't help wondering why the press was suddenly so concerned about UNITA's safety that it would deliberately spread disinformation. "What now?" asked Nico, "We aren't supposed to be leading the MPLA's advance against UNITA's headquarters in Jamba—what is with these people, aren't they supposed to report facts? Who are they really working for?"

"They need to warn UNITA. Of course, the media is riddled with MI and DFA propagandists who will write whatever they're told to. On one hand they claim that UNITA wants peace; on the other, South Africa has a cosy relationship with Savimbi and is still selling him weapons. But don't worry, if they want war, we'll give them war and destroy UNITA's forces once and for all. In fact, I think we should establish our own RRF (rapid reaction force) and make their allegations come true," I replied.

In a further development, De Wet Potgieter wrote (in the Rapport of 19 September) that a group of 'mercenaries were threatening to go on the warpath'. He didn't mention Executive Outcomes by name, but wrote, 'This time APLA is the enemy and the old war dogs are recruiting ex-members of the SA Defence Force's elite combat forces to attack units of the PAC's military wing and in particular the radical splinter group Revolutionary Watchdogs.' It was obvious that Potgieter was doing everything in his power to ferment political and racial unrest and using EO as part of his deception.

In a personal interview with Potgieter on 23 September, I told him that his article implying that EO had targeted South African political organisations had been in poor taste. He just smiled smugly. I went on to say that the Angolan High Command was war weary and wanted peace in Angola; the FAA generals knew they had been abandoned and betrayed by the UN, the US, and Africa in general, and considered EO to be making a huge contribution towards resolving the conflict. I also told him, as I had told several

journalists before that, that Africa had to solve its own problems because both the West and the UN had proved themselves unwilling, incapable, and inept at bringing about any form of peace in Africa. The deployment and success—or lack thereof—of the UNAVEM monitors was public knowledge.

Potgieter apparently ignored what I told him because none of it ever appeared under his by-line.

As the disinformation campaign gathered momentum, so too did our recruitment of men and their movement to Angola. If the SADF and DFA had been hoping to use the media to stop people from joining EO, their campaign had failed; the more the media attacked us, the more men flocked to join us. By this time I had recruited two agents within Military Intelligence whose task it was to provide me with feedback relating to reports on EO and any actions planned against the company. They were regularly debriefed.

As my initial proposal to the Angolans had indicated, we ultimately planned to have 500 men on the ground in various locations throughout Angola. Meanwhile, the Angolan General Staff had condensed the agreed upon timeline for training 16 Brigade and the recruitment process had to be sped up to comply with their demands. We needed to ensure that we could deliver the correct man, fed and ready, with the correct equipment, at the correct place and at the correct time—and if necessary, evacuate him equally quickly and efficiently. It would take more than King Airs to accomplish this. In addition, I anticipated we would soon require a massive air- transport capability, high-capacity and sustainable logistical supply lines, a very streamlined medevac procedure, and a larger airlift capability.

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At midnight on 25-26 September 1993, the UN Security Council implemented a resolution to enforce an oil and arms embargo against Angola. Interestingly, no such sanctions were placed on the diamonds being sold by UNITA. The situation in Angola itself was deteriorating rapidly. According to Human Rights Watch:

The numbers of people displaced by the conflict continues to grow, estimated at two million by June 1993. According to the government, Angola required 27 000 tons of food per month plus medical supplies. Commercial food imports into Luanda diminished due to the lack of foreign exchange, with the government being forced to spend money on armaments and exporters being reluctant to send ships into a war zone. A UN World Food Programme report suggested that a significant proportion of Angola's harvest would rot due to disruption caused by the fighting and estimated that 1.9 million conflict and drought-affected persons would require 337 000 tons of food assistance.

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I received daily telephone calls from the media, accusing both myself and the company of committing war crimes in Angola. Ironically, our men were still gathering at Cabo Ledo and had not even seen UNITA since their arrival there. I abruptly told them to report us to

the SAP. Some journalists openly called me a communist or accused me of being intent on destabilising Africa.

Lafras told me that the Angolan General Staff were concerned about the possibility of the account into which they were paying funds being frozen as a result of the impression (created by all the negative reporting) that we were involved in criminal activities. He suggested we open an account in Hong Kong, where politics didn't interfere with banking. I agreed and dispatched him to arrange an account with a provision that also allowed the Angolans to monitor it.

I discussed this new development with Mr Spies of the Reserve Bank who told me he doubted our funds could be frozen, but nevertheless thought our idea was sound.

Lafras returned several days later with the news that we now also held an account with the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). In future, all Angolan funds would be remitted there and then forwarded to South Africa as circumstances demanded. In this manner, we could protect our client's funds from possible confiscation. I gave Lafras control over this account as I was a targeted individual. I wanted to be sure that if anything happened to me, the project would not be jeopardised.

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In Angola, things were going as well as could be expected despite numerous hiccups (mainly relating to the provision of weapons, ammunition, and recruits for training) from the Angolan side.

The Angolans had assigned a liaison officer to us—Major Antonio Lucas, who some of my men had met during the Soyo operation. He was a happy-go-lucky character who spoke good English and saw himself more as a member of EO than of the FAA. Antonio Lucas was a great help and did his best to ensure that my men were able to get on with their jobs with as little interference as possible. He was also well positioned to provide us with insight into what UNAVEM II was doing.

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In South Africa, the newspapers changed their direction of assault. Reports now claimed that EO had initially worked for UNITA, providing them with training and advice. It was alleged that I had switched sides after the FAA had offered me substantially more money. I realised that the aim was to make the FAA doubt our integrity and terminate our contract. More alarming to me was that if the Angolans believed these lies, it was even conceivable that they would arrest us and try us as UNITA agents. I had to stop this sinister campaign from taking hold. In late September I flew to Luanda to discuss it with the generals.

Things were boiling behind the scenes there too.

At his headquarters, General Luis Faćeira told me that the SADF had officially offered to assist the FAA with training. I smiled when I heard this latest development. It was not

unreasonable to surmise that the SADF was planning to make sure the FAA would remain incapable of winning the war.

General Faćeira in turn saw this as an effort by UNITA supporters in the SADF and the SA government to win time for UNITA to rebuild their forces before launching an all-out assault on the FAA and the MPLA government. He, too, was convinced that the intention was to get us out of Angola. He also informed me that South Africa was flying weapons and ammunition from Mmabathu in the Bophuthatswana 'homeland' to UNITA bases in Angola and Zaire.

General De Matos had already rejected the SADF's offer for training having intuited that neither it nor the South African government could be trusted. Reflecting on my own experiences, I couldn't have agreed more. However, I had to allay any fears he might have had concerning our alleged help to UNITA before having accepted the FAA contract.

"General, the South African media is now claiming that Executive Outcomes once worked for UNITA but switched sides when the FAA offered us more money. I want you to know that this is an utter lie."

"I have learnt never to pay any attention to your newspapers," General De Matos responded. "I'm also sure that if you had worked for UNITA you would have told us at our first meeting in Etosha. Just give me your word that you never worked for them. I trust that more than I trust your newspapers or your government."

I gave my word and he said the subject would never be mentioned again.

He then surprised me by informing me that it had been agreed that I be afforded all the status and privileges of a Major General. I was somewhat taken aback as when I was fired by de Klerk, I was a mere 'temporary colonel', working for an organisation that officially didn't exist, in a world that similarly didn't exist for most South Africans. De Matos also suggested that I wear my new rank when I visited the FAA headquarters in Luanda in FAA uniform. I never took him up on his offer.

"Now General, what must we do to end this war?' he asked, changing the subject. "If you were in our boots, what would your strategy be?"

I reminded him that I was, in effect, in their boots.

"We need to cut off UNITA's cash supply...take the diamond fields in the north, seal off all ports they may hold, impose flight restrictions into UNITA-held areas— and where aircraft illegally fly into these areas, shoot them down. We need to deprive UNITA of their cash-generators and disrupt their supply lines. Without money, they won't be able to buy the weaponry and other support they need. We also need to get the povo (local Angolan population) on our side by helping them in small ways. Then it will only be a matter of out-fighting and out-manoeuvring them on the battlefield."

"Do you really believe we can do this?" he asked.

"Of course we can. Give us the men to train and the equipment to train them with. If you want us to, we will help you with strategic, operational, and tactical planning and make sure you achieve victory on the battlefield."

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In an apparent attempt to pre-empt negative blowback after the Angolans had rejected the SADF offer, an article titled, 'Angola looks to SADF for training', appeared in the Pretoria News on 27 September. It stated, 'the SADF is on the brink of again becoming involved in the Angolan conflict, but this time on the side of their former enemies. A spokesman for the SADF said that if discussions were underway, it would be at a diplomatic level'.

On 29 September, Beeld published a piece that read, 'South Africa is not involved in war efforts in Angola'. It appeared to be another attempt to conceal the duplicity in which our political and military leaders were enmeshed. I also believed it was designed to mislead the South African public about what was really going on to the north.

As our contingent continued to build up in Angola, I started to get threatening phone calls at odd hours of the day and night. Such callers invariably promised to kill me if I went ahead with the Angolan contract. I challenged many of them to come over and put their threats into practice, but of course, none had the courage to do that. It was becoming increasingly obvious that the contract also posed dangers in South Africa. I wasn't going to fall into the trap of underestimating my adversaries. I realised that certain major multinational companies might stop at nothing to obstruct our endeavours. Diamonds were not only a girl's best friend; they were a commodity worth killing for.

The media now started alleging that we were a 'destabilising force' of rogue soldiers who needed to be curbed. The implication was that EO was out of control and running around Africa, willing to work for the highest bidder. The fact that the Angolans viewed us as part of FAA never featured in these ludicrous accusations, which also showed a total lack of understanding of the situation in Africa. There could never be stability without peace—and peace in Angola certainly wouldn't come in the middle of an armed insurrection by UNITA. The majority of Angolans wanted the war to end as quickly as possible, yet, despite the fact that we were helping them to achieve this, we were viewed, in South Africa, as a 'destabilising element'. The media's collective stupidity was astonishing.

The number of South Africans who suddenly seemed to be so very concerned about the situation in Angola was equally astonishing. In my analysis, South Africa had been fuelling the war in Angola for years, and had tried very hard to replace the MPLA with UNITA. The fact that a private company had been asked to assist the legitimate government—effectively the losing side in the war—now appeared to be a catalyst for anger.

Harry Carlse, one of the men who had stood his ground in Soyo, related an incident that occurred when he was tasked to visit Pomfret[152] in the Northern Cape and recruit out of work 32 Bn soldiers:

As you may recall, I was sent to Pomfret to recruit unemployed soldiers from 32 Bn. It was the first of two trips to the base there. I was, at that time, not really aware of the very sick attitude that the SADF and other political and business entities and individuals had towards EO, and in particular towards you. I was very well received by the troops, both

serving and unemployed, as the majority were desperately in need of money—or would soon need an income—to sustain their families. Having been abandoned by the SADF and then the SANDF—and with rumours of the closure of the unit abounding—they wanted to find work for when they were shut down. Many were already facing extreme poverty—others knew they would soon be turfed out of the SANDF.

Shortly after meeting and talking to the troops, the military police came and 'arrested' me. I was taken to the base commander and after a chat he 'released' me on condition I never return to Pomfret. By then word was out that EO was looking for good men, and I had already established contact with many potential recruits.

On my second trip I had to help the recruits get their passports in order. This I did at the passport office in Vryburg—they were very helpful and processed the travel documents in a very short space of time.

During my second visit to Pomfret I realised that a Special Forces counter- intelligence surveillance team was tailing me. Vryburg, as you know, is not very big and they stood out like a sore thumb. This, I later learnt, was done at great expense, as the team, which consisted of two vehicles and personnel, were flown, by military aircraft, from Waterkloof airbase, Pretoria. No prizes for guessing who paid for that costly flight.

When I picked them up, I initially played games with them but I soon got bored with that and gave them a 'toffee'.[153] Waal[154] later told me he had been ordered by Colonel JAB Swart to conduct surveillance on me as he believed I was doing something 'illegal'. I told him, instead of wasting time and money, that he should rather just have phoned me. Unlike them, we were transparent about what we were doing.

Shortly thereafter a memo was circulated in the SADF declaring you, Lafras, and myself persona non grata in all SANDF bases anywhere in SA. It was apparent that the generals wanted the troops to have no sustainable income once they had enjoyed the pleasure of firing them.

On 30 September Beeld published an article clearly intended to mislead the public. Attributed to a 'correspondent in Cape Town', the headline read, '32 Battalion will fight UNITA in Angola'. It claimed that 'according to sources close to the organisers [Executive Outcomes] the battle group, which will become known as the independent 32 Battalion Group will be commanded by a brigadier and supported by a tank squadron, a mechanised infantry company, and a helicopter wing. The battle group will consist of a headquarters, four infantry companies, a reconnaissance platoon, an artillery battery, and an engineer company. The second in command will be a colonel.'

I suspected either Ingo Capraro or De Wet Potgieter's pen had been responsible. The fact of the matter was that, thanks to President de Klerk, 32 Battalion had been arbitrarily disbanded. The majority of 32 Battalion's soldiers were Angolan citizens. I had asked, during my meeting with the generals in Etosha, if they could be brought back into Angola as they had no future in South Africa whether under a Nationalist or an ANC government. I had also asked that their Angolan citizenship be restored and for each to be given land on

which to settle. The Angolan delegation had agreed to all of this. To suggest that we intended to reform 32 Battalion in Angola was absurd.

Several of the men's families began contacting us complaining about problems they were experiencing with the banks their husbands or sons were using.

We attributed this directly to the negative press we had been subjected to. We helped many families to switch their bank accounts, but the banks fought furiously to retain the business, promising to rectify the 'administrative problems' immediately. Their words seldom translated into effective actions.

Then, some families began receiving anonymous telephone calls from people promising revenge against 'the traitors' and threatening to rape wives and children, kill them, burn their houses down, and rob them at gunpoint. I suspected the callers might be Military Intelligence agents[155] and found this tactic reprehensible. It caused EO's men grave concern and I had to pacify the many families who came to our offices begging for help.

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The initial trickle of men sent to Cabo Ledo soon became a flood, and there were joyous reunions as white and black former SADF soldiers found themselves thrown together once again. Ex-MK men were also welcomed and integrated. The situation was very different from the media's depiction of us as racist dogs of war.

The EO country HQ at Cabo Ledo (photo: unknown)

Joy was not so apparent in the ranks of the FAA; it pained many of the FAA soldiers to see large numbers of ex-SADF soldiers in their midst. Even though General De Matos had instructed them to view our men as friends and allies, many of them still found EO's men difficult to accept. Some even felt that the promises made to us regarding weapons and equipment indicated that we were getting preferential treatment. This led to frustration as the FAA, contrary to De Matos' orders, refused to issue weapons, ammunition, and other equipment to my men. Tensions grew and some of the men even spoke of leaving. Our main function was to rebuild the 16 Brigade destroyed by the SADF, but we still didn't have a training area or FAA recruits to train and this also had to be rectified. The last thing

we needed was for such stories to be fed to the media. When our officers told us they were unable to resolve the problems between the two groups I despatched Lafras to Luanda to brief the Angolan authorities on these and other issues related to equipment and training and soon our men started receiving a trickle of weapons and other equipment.

Lafras and I agreed to allocate military ranks to the men to reintroduce a hierarchy and military discipline, and to place selected men on the same level as the senior FAA officers with whom they would be interfacing. It would hardly have been appropriate for Mister X to tell the FAA's Colonel Y what to do.

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In early August, I was phoned by a man who claimed to represent an 'interested party'. He identified himself as 'Raymond' and asked to meet me, preferably in London but otherwise anywhere else in Europe. I had no idea who he was or what he represented but I still felt that I should see him. I flew to London for the meeting, much to Nico's concern who thought it was a ploy to get me onto neutral ground and assassinate me.

On 15 August I cleared immigration and customs at Heathrow without a problem, despite the British security services now being aware of my CCB background (thanks to Capraro and his handler). I took a taxi to Paddington Station, called the mobile number Raymond had given me from a payphone, and arranged to meet him at Café Royal off Regent Street at 14:00. Then I contacted Ron, my old CCB agent, and gave him instructions to support me. He turned up with the pistol I had intended to use many years before but hadn't.

"Good to see you, Boss," Ron smiled and handed me the pistol in a paper package on the fifth floor of Hamley's toy store in Regent Street.

"Likewise, Ron," I said, "I need you to watch my back at a meeting soon to be taking place in Café Royal."

Between shelves packed with toys, I stuck the pistol into my belt and quickly told Ron what was required. I needed him to cover me in case Raymond had more than a sociable get-together in mind. Ron got to the restaurant well before the appointed time, found himself a table, ordered a meal, and waited for Raymond and I to enter.

I was to position Raymond in such a way that Ron could easily cover him.

Raymond knew what I looked like and introduced himself. I steered him to an appropriate table. He wasted no time on pleasantries.

"I represent a party who is concerned about the situation in Angola and the effect it's having on our business."

He spoke with a plum-in-the-mouth, upper-class British accent—real or fake I wasn't sure.

"So why did you need me to fly to London?"

"Mr Barlow, you are a businessman. What I want to talk to you about is… let me be frank...no one really gives a shit about Angola or who governs it."

"I do," I responded. "What are you trying to tell me?" "Frankly, my principals want you out of Angola." "And if I refuse? Will you try to kill me?" I asked.

"Good Lord, no. None of us want this to come to bloodshed. I'm here to make you the proverbial offer that you cannot refuse."

"Make it and try me."

"We will pay you US$20 million to leave Angola immediately. As a gesture of goodwill half will be paid upfront into an account of your choice anywhere in the world. The balance will be paid once you have shut down Executive Outcomes, terminated your contract with the Angolans, and taken all your men out of Angola."

"And if I refuse this generous offer of yours?"

"Life could become difficult for you. The world can be a very small place."

I suspected he was representing an oil or diamond company; no one else would have that kind of money to throw at a bribe. The oil companies were drilling offshore so the ground war didn't really affect their operations which meant that Raymond was probably fronting for a diamond company.

"I don't like threats," I said.

"What do you have to say about our proposition?" he persisted.

"My answer is a simple no. I have given my word to the Angolan government and I don't go back on my word."

"You may live to regret it. Twenty million dollars is a lot of money," he said in a tone of disbelief.

"I suggest you forget your threat or you might end up regretting you ever met me," I said.

I terminated the meeting without shaking hands and left.

I later linked up with Ron at the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch and returned the pistol. That night I flew back to South Africa.

There were two possible explanations. The most likely was that Raymond represented a mining company dealing in so-called 'conflict diamonds'. The less likely was that the MPLA had sent him to test my reaction to the offer of a bribe. I didn't think he represented UNITA; I doubted they had that sort of spare cash lying around.

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On my return, Lafras and Nico briefed me on the Angolan front. Lafras had arranged with the generals for us to build our own training camp (which later became known as Rio Longa) on the banks of the Longa River, about 70 kilometres south of Cabo Ledo. The men first had to clear dense bush, construct quarters, and then build a base area for the incoming recruits.

I approached Colonel Hennie Blaauw and asked if he would command the training operation. Hennie came with a distinguished military history which included service in the Parachute Brigade, Special Forces, and several years as the chief of staff of 7 Infantry Division. I had never met him but I had jumped with his brother during a parachute training exercise many years before. The Blaauw brothers—there were three of them—enjoyed a formidable reputation and had gained huge respect amongst those who had

served with and under them. He jumped at the opportunity as he was looking for something exciting to do and he was soon on his way to Cabo Ledo.

"Oom",[156] Hennie arrived at Longa at exactly the right time and he immediately got to work getting FAA recruits into training. He understood the Angolan culture and quickly made friends with the FAA's senior officers. With Oom Hennie's drive (or more accurately, his pushing, shoving, swearing, and pleading) things finally started to happen.

But things were still going too slowly for the FAA. They wanted the training to get off the ground immediately, despite the lack of infrastructure—and ignoring the fact that it was they who had been dragging their heels. This soon led to some tension between the FAA camp commandant, Brigadier Valeriano, and my men. The brigadier was a pleasant and easy-going man but he couldn't understand why we hadn't started with combat training. This frustrated him no end, because he was supposed to provide feedback to his General Staff and felt that the lack of progress indicated he was unable to control the South Africans. He demanded that the situation be rectified as soon as possible, but since there was a shortage of recruits and equipment, my men were somewhat between a rock and a hard place.

Oom Hennie and his team were adamant about not being prepared to train young men who the FAA had press-ganged into the army. In the FAA's mind, if a man was big enough—or looked big enough—he was soldier material. That was where Oom Hennie put his foot down. He later recounted:

There was no way I would allow myself or any of our men to get involved in training kids to go to war. Despite Brigadier Valeriano's protestations we set a criterion for recruits that included the following aspects:

Recruits had to be at least sixteen years old.

The recruits had to be physically capable of coping with the training. For this purpose our medics gave incoming recruits a medical examination.

They had to have the mental capacity of a young adult and not that of a child.

Oom Hennie's parameters went down like the proverbial lead balloon.

Initially, Valeriano saw this as an attempt to stall the training. From our point of view, we didn't want the FAA to be seen in the same light as the armed forces or rebels in other African conflicts where children were often conscripted. As far as I was concerned, if they wanted to train children they could do it in their own training areas and not ours. Eventually this went all the way up to General De Matos, who

All FAA recruits had to undergo selection if they were to cope with the rigours of battle (photo: unknown)

finally took the point. At a subsequent meeting, he again apologised to me for the delays the FAA were creating.

Nevertheless, we were concerned: the longer the FAA-generated delays continued, the stronger UNITA would grow in the field. We continually urged the Angolans to drastically accelerate the provision of conscripts and equipment. Getting uniforms and weapons also required much cajoling, numerous threats, and constant cursing on our part, but things slowly started coming together. Rifles gradually replaced sticks and eventually the real training could begin.

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Preparing the incoming recruits for battle with UNITA was easier said than done. The stories they had heard from fathers and older brothers who had once been pitted against the South Africans on the battlefield left them with an initial fear and distrust of my men. They were also uncomfortably aware that once they had been trained they would be dispatched to some remote part of Angola where there was a good chance they would be killed or wounded in combat. In the Angola of 1993 (with its lack of sophisticated medical facilities) a wound was often as good as a death warrant and naturally the young recruits knew this.

There was also the question of medical fitness: Angola had been at war for many long and hard years, and with basic medical care facilities having broken down, our own doctors and medics had to assume responsibility for getting recruits medically fit and keeping them in that condition. Recruits were routinely treated for malaria, malnutrition, intestinal parasites, stomach disorders, and other endemic diseases.

Our training base on the Longa River gave us easy access to water, but there was a concern about possible waterborne diseases. Our sapper detachment soon started purifying great volumes of water, but it soon became apparent that the povo had their own problems accessing clean water. Water was a plentiful commodity, but clean water was an expensive one—the povo had to buy it at great cost, and most could not afford it.

EO sappers at Rio Longa provided water to both EO and the povo, 1993

Our engineers set about purifying sufficient clean water for the local population's use, and soon they were purifying in excess of 60 000 litres a day. This cultivated trust, and before long our medics were also giving medical aid to people from near and far.

The locals started waving at us when we drove past, happy to have us around. When our medics were tasked to set up clinics for the sick among them, they started moving closer to our base at Rio Longa as we represented a sense of security they were desperate to have.

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Many of our black members had taken part in operations against the FAA while serving with 32 Battalion or Special Forces, and most had been out of touch with their families since fleeing Angola in 1976. Tearful scenes occurred when they were finally reunited, and EO's leader element gave these men as much time as possible to catch up on the lost years. This was an enormous morale booster, especially for our black men.

The ratio of white-to-black soldiers in EO was about one to five, yet the media still referred to us as 'racists'. It didn't matter what we did or didn't do. They had established their narrative and they made every attempt to ensure the label would stick. Knowing that they controlled perceptions, they all sucked their copy out of the same thumb, and continued to write articles that would vilify the company and myself.

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As our manpower contingent in Angola grew, our logistical supply lines started taking more and more strain and they soon came close to breaking-point. Not only were we shuttling men, post, and fresh rations, requirements for on-the-ground equipment also started growing. We needed helmets, boots, sleeping bags, flak- jackets, webbing, and much more.

ProPilot, with Crause at the helm, were providing the best support they were capable of, but we had reached the stage where our strategic airlift capabilities needed to be

drastically reviewed and improved. One of our main concerns was the medevac of our men who had either taken ill or been injured. We also knew from our experiences at Soyo that UNITA would attack us as soon as the opportunity presented itself, and then we would need medevac facilities on call. Similarly, accidents in training would require immediate medical intervention. Delayed casevacs would lead to loss of lives and morale, and we wanted to prevent those at all costs. ProPilot was simply not equipped to fulfil their role effectively.

"Crause, why don't we lease some Boeings?" Lafras asked. "Because it is just too damned expensive," Crause replied. "Can't we buy them, then?" asked Lafras.

"If you're serious I can go off to the USA and see what I can find," Crause responded.

Upon his return, he told us that he had found two very good Boeing 727s that he thought were ideally suited to support the entire project, regardless of where or how we would be operating.

With that, 'Capricorn Systems', a commercial airline supporting Executive Outcomes, was born. Crause selected some pilots who went off to the United States to get 727 certification, and within a few months, Capricorn[157] was flying more than just our men and materials into Cabo Ledo—several businessmen and the South African national soccer team also made use of our reliable service to Angola. We later learnt (to our great amusement and surprise) that, according to a classified MI briefing on EO, Capricorn Air was 'coincidentally believed to be the descendant of the Capricorn Africa Society established by the mercenary founder of the SAS, David Stirling'. Either their stupidity or their dishonesty knew no bounds.

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By early October, we despatched our first helicopter pilots to train with the Angolan Air Force. Arthur Walker, Carl Alberts, Sonny Janeke, J C Linde and Pete Minnaar (a flight engineer) were amongst the finest helicopter pilots the SAAF had ever produced. They were later joined by Charlie Tait, another flyer from their old SAAF group. Arthur Walker, a two-time winner of the Honoris Crux (Gold), Carl Alberts (Honoris Crux), and their colleagues were all well known to those of us who had found ourselves isolated on Angolan battlefields in the past. Not only were they combat-seasoned and renowned for going up against any danger to support their comrades on the ground, their skill and bravery were legendary. They were a happy- go-lucky bunch of hell-raisers which did nothing to detract from their remarkable flying abilities.

On arrival at Cabo Ledo, they immediately set to work drawing up requirements for implementation by General Pedro Neto, the Chief of the Angolan Air Force. At the top of their list were troop-carrying helicopters and helicopter gunships. They were extremely disappointed to learn that it would be several weeks before they could do conversion training from the Puma helicopters they were familiar with, to the Russian-made Mi-8[158].

The conversion course commenced with the pilots having to memorise a drawing of the instrument panel long before the actual helicopters arrived. This familiarity was all-

important as the panels were marked in Russian which none of them could read or speak.

Initial EO air crew at Cabo Ledo. Standing (left to right) JC Linde, Sonny Janeke, Louwrens Bosch, Arthur Walker. Kneeling (left to right) Pete Minnaar, Carl Alberts

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There was no sign that the intensity of the press campaign was going to ease off. Indeed, seldom a day went past that we were not in the newspapers. It was also very obvious to me that the media were now also attempting to discredit us with the United Nations.

On 8 October 1993, fed up with the harassment and disinformation being pumped into the media by MI and its associate units, I wrote a detailed press release that candidly laid out our policies and activities, and catalogued some of the disinformation written about us.

I explained the background to the Soyo contract and described how we had been forced into fighting UNITA, resulting in three of my men being killed in action. I recounted how the Angolan High Command had later asked us to train their army, and how I had recruited ex-soldiers (most of whom had been retrenched by the SADF) for this purpose.

I indicated that the contract had brought large sums of much-needed foreign currency into South Africa, much of which was being spent with South African suppliers and manufacturers—all with the authority and knowledge of the SA Reserve Bank.

As was to be expected, most journalists ignored the press release; the reality did not match their narrative.

The Star was the only newspaper to follow up with some positive coverage. On 18 October an article headed, 'SADF smear campaign alleged', written by Jacqueline Myburgh and Norman Chandler, objectively reported:

The conflict between Executive Outcomes and the SADF was brought to a head ten days ago when the SADF grounded a plane at Lanseria Airport as it was about to take off for Angola with eighteen ex-SADF soldiers and technicians on board. Tom Robbertse of Lowex Air Cargo, the Swiss company that owns the Russian Antonov, said the SADF's

claim that it had grounded the plane because the Russian crew had not paid their bill at a South African Air Force mess was ‘one hell of a lie’.

The SADF later claimed that it was unaware that former soldiers were on board the flight. The SADF has in the past contacted the wives of the men employed in Angola and threatened them or told them that their husbands had been killed.

Colonel JAB Swart seemed to be the driving force behind this mess and he swaggered around as though he owned the airport. His smile soon faded when some of the men threatened to get violent and he quickly fled the scene.

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In late October our first fighter-pilot instructors arrived at Cabo Ledo. In command was Lieutenant Colonel Pine Pienaar, a fine officer and aviator who, with the changing political landscape in South Africa, had come to realise that his

SAAF career had reached its ceiling. With Pine were Gustav Fouche and Louwrens Bosch. They too had to wait for their conversion training from Mirage and Cheetah aircraft to MiG-23 MLs. At least they got to play with a single unarmed Pilatus PC-7 the Angolan Air Force had lent them.

In no time at all, they had fixed rocket pods to the Pilatus and were soon test- flying and firing rockets with increasing accuracy. This extraordinary piece of improvisation would later save the lives of the many men who would call on Pine and his team for help. The Pilatus factory in Switzerland would have been horrified to learn that their unarmed trainer had been modified into a deadly ground-attack aircraft.

***

Our first disaster struck on 10 November. Wayne Ross-Smith, an ex-Special Forces soldier and a student from my covert training days, was wounded by grenade shrapnel. Thys Pelser phoned from the Comcen at Lafras’ house and explained that Wayne had been casevaced from Rio Longa to Cabo Ledo where he was undergoing medical treatment. His condition was serious but stable. I raced over to the Comcen to get more information from Thys and later spoke to Wayne on the radio.

“Hey, man, I’m okay,” he said cheerfully. “It was a dumb thing that happened but I’ll be fine. The doc is planning to casevac me to South Africa tomorrow so I’ll see you then. Don’t worry about me—just watch your back.”

Wayne was casevaced the following day but tragically died en route to South Africa—our first fatality of the FAA contract. I was devastated by his death.

***

Later in November I travelled to Debswana’s offices in Gaberone and presented another training programme to Bill Phaphe’s prospective undercover agents at their safe-house training facility. Bill visited the students on several occasions to see how they were doing and from his feedback, I could tell he was satisfied with their progress.

At the end of the course we discussed where the Koffiefontein operation might have gone wrong and determined how to avoid similar problems in the future. He also placed an order with me for covert electronic surveillance equipment.

The evening before I left Botswana I had dinner with Bill at my hotel. We parted as good friends and I returned to South Africa knowing that he intended to implement my plan to combat diamond theft at the Debswana facilities.

***

Around this time I appointed Johan Mostert (an ex-Koevoet operator living in Windhoek)[159] to recruit out of work ex-Koevoet members. As with the SADF, the Koevoet members had been betrayed by their South African masters and many of them were unemployed, and living in squalor in Windhoek.

On 17 November, the Windhoek-based newspaper The Namibian published an article claiming that EO was nothing more than a war-hungry group of mercenaries.

On 28 November the Namibian paper Tempo Sunday followed up with an article in a similar vein.

As a result, the Namibian government confiscated the ex-Koevoet men's travel documents.

This prompted me to write directly to President Sam Nujoma's office. I explained that we had appointed Johan Mostert to recruit unemployed ex-military and police personnel for our Angolan contract (Mostert had so far recruited 67 men) and stressed that we posed no threat to Namibia's national security. I also said that we were more than willing to recruit former members of SWAPO's People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) if they had a high instructional capability. By then, I had already written to the Namibian Minister of Home Affairs (H Pohamba) and asked him to release the travel documents of the 67 men—who for three weeks had been held at a place called Brakwater. That stay had already cost Executive Outcomes over R28 000.

The author wrote to President Nujoma's office asking him to return confiscated travel documents to Namibian citizens (photo: The Namibian)

President Nujoma didn't respond to my letter but the passports were promptly returned and the men were able to travel to South Africa to join the company.

Shortly afterwards a Namibian newspaper wrote:

In Pretoria yesterday, Mr Eeben Barlow of Executive Outcomes ... said he was disappointed with the delays the 67 ex-Koevoet fighters were currently experiencing. 'I need not tell you that those men were in close proximity to Angolan destinations where they could report for duty to the Angolan government. Our advice was not to do that but to work through legal channels, and legal channels means contact with the Namibian government, securing the necessary documentation and passports, and doing things within the confines of the law.

***

I learnt through an agent that MI had, in the meantime, established a dedicated EO 'desk', run by a female major, and tasked to sabotage us by generating false and misleading intelligence. Several agents had already been briefed to infiltrate the company. According to my agents, much of the dubious intelligence gathered was immediately passed on to the media. Some of these blatantly fabricated reports found their way into my hands. Where information about us was accurate, it was apparently passed on to UNITA by MI.

According to my agents, it didn't matter that 'the intelligence' had been fabricated. The disinformation campaign was being orchestrated by a senior officer in Special Forces headquarters who had already been transferred to Army Intelligence. From experience, I knew this would be Colonel JAB Swart, who was working overtime to discredit the company and myself all because I had not paid for his jolly to Switzerland.

Army Intelligence (also known as GS2) was the SADF's ground forces' intelligence staff compartment. It liaised with MI but it had its own manpower, budget, and missions. MI had roped GS2 in to assist with efforts to produce intelligence that would 'make Executive Outcomes look bad'. My agents also warned we should be careful of a person called Cleary as he was 'out to get us'. I remembered the name from my discussions with Colonel Prinsloo, but it would be some time before I discovered who he was.

By this time the Department of Foreign Affairs had also established a 'UNITA desk', but I was told by a serving National Intelligence Service operative that the name was merely a cover; Executive Outcomes was its true target. Effectively, we had a 'desk' at both MI and DFA. They were really starting to take us seriously.

I continually asked myself why the DFA was so concerned about Angola's internal affairs.

The police began to visit us again, asking questions about the 'illegal work' we were supposed to be engaged in as well as the reported 'financial irregularities' we were supposedly committing. I gave them open access to all the company documentation and told them that they were at liberty to summarily arrest me if they could find evidence of any illegal actions on our part. The SAP gave me the impression they were merely

following up on information that had been passed to them—obviously by the DFA, MI and GS2.

The agents I had recruited worked hard to ferret out information. Initially I had only targeted MI and Foreign Affairs, where the greatest threats appeared to lie, but I was forced to expand my target areas for collection over the coming months.

I codenamed one double-agent being run by the Directorate of Covert Collection in my organisation as 'Wizard'. Wizard told me that he had been tasked to lift[160] documentation from Executive Outcomes. I obliged by giving him a relatively unimportant single page document. He didn't know it but I had put specific information in to see where it would resurface (known in intelligence speak as a 'Barium meal'). At our next debriefing, Wizard provided feedback on his handler's reaction to the document, saying that he had been ecstatic. Little did they know, the document was nothing but a fabrication intended to take the wind out of their sails.

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That November a UNAVEM report noted:

The United Nations continued its efforts to facilitate the resumption of the peace process in consultation with the Angolan parties and interested countries, including, in particular, the observer States to the Peace Accords—Portugal, the Russian Federation, and the United States. On 15 November 1993, following extensive consultations and exploratory talks, the Government of Angola and UNITA began talks in Lusaka, Zambia, chaired by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Alioune Blondin Beye (formerly the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali who succeeded Ms Anstee on 28 June 1993),

... The question of national reconciliation proved to be the most difficult, since it involved matters such as the allocation of senior government posts to UNITA, including the governorships of provinces.

Although talks between the MPLA and UNITA had commenced in Lusaka, the FAA's General Staff told us that this would in no way affect our contract. They would still need the army trained and UNITA soldiers integrated into its ranks when the time came.

According to a contemporary UN report, the civil war was killing at least 1 000 people a day and was becoming one of the world's bloodiest conflicts. The UN had been quick to intervene—with words, not actions—and by October 1993, a mediating mission led by Alioune Blondin Beye had imposed a media blackout in an attempt to stifle the ever worsening situation. To gain further concessions from the Angolan government, however, UNITA had broken the news embargo and hopes of an early settlement had been dashed.

***

In December 1993 our first Mi-8/17 helicopter arrived and our pilots' long wait seemed to be over. They were somewhat bemused to see the large machine painted in civilian

livery with Russian Cyrillic script on its fuselage, but they soon replaced this with a camouflage pattern and modified the helicopter to suit our needs.

While waiting for more helicopters to arrive the pilots flew the Mi-17 continually, getting to know its idiosyncrasies and becoming increasingly impressed with its power and abilities. They knew it was likely they would one day face UNITA ground fire, so they worked hard at readying themselves and the machine to survive a hostile environment.

***

On 19 December, under Johan Kruger's byline, Rapport published a shocking story targeting Executive Outcomes.

The headline read, 'Hungry bush fighters eat fallen comrades'.

Huursoldate vertel gru-verhale oor Angola

Honger bosvegters eet gevalle makkers

Rapport's contribution to the disinformation campaign against EO claiming the company had turned to cannibalism

Illustrating the article was a photograph of a man we had discharged for unacceptable behaviour. Kruger claimed that his informant wished to remain anonymous because he feared for his life and the lives of his family. In addition to the grotesque allegations of cannibalism within the company, the story averred that EO was the cause of the war in Angola and that its men went around killing people just to get beer.

Needless to say, Rapport had not approached us for comment. It might have ruined their sensational sales-booster.

***

On 21 December we received a fax that levelled various threats against the company and intimated that those at 317 Danny Street, the company headquarters and my residence, were in for a 'big surprise'. The sender had obviously forgotten that the fax machine he was using automatically printed the transmission date and the number of the phone he was using, and it didn't take us long to trace the phone to the South African Police offices at Rooiberg[161].

On 23 December I sent a strongly worded letter to the station commander, Colonel Serfontein, demanding an explanation.

At 15:17 the same afternoon I received a faxed reply referenced 2/28/30 and signed by Serfontein himself.

His letter, translated from Afrikaans, read:

The letter you refer to is not an official police document and the SAP wishes to distance itself from the contents. It was sent from the facsimile machine of this office without authorisation so it was without my knowledge or approval. I am of the opinion that the letter is not a threat towards your company. I have no knowledge of being involved in a 'problem' as referred to by you. I do have knowledge, however, of the scandal doing the rounds but I do not take note of such things and reject them with the contempt they deserve. As the document was unauthorised, nobody here has admitted to sending it.

I can give you an assurance that no member of this unit has a vendetta or a grievance against you or your company. If this is the case, I have no knowledge of it.

JJ Serfontein (signed)

I didn't for one moment believe Colonel Serfontein, so I decided the time was ripe to start recruiting agents in the South African Police. The campaign to level threats directly against us had begun. I was determined to find out who was behind it all—and why.

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On Christmas Day we flew a festive dinner to our men in Angola. I hoped it would make them appreciate that they were always in our thoughts, even though we were far away.

They were blissfully unaware of the ongoing disinformation campaign in South Africa and we didn't particularly want them to know about it in case it made them lose focus or impacted negatively on their morale.

***

Towards the end of December I was phoned by a man who introduced himself as Bertie Jackson and asked if he could come to my office for a chat. I agreed and a few hours later he arrived at Danny Street.

He told me that he was an officer with the NIS[162] and that he had been instructed to investigate our activities.[163]

"You are no doubt aware that Military Intelligence, Army Intelligence, and the DFA are very concerned about what you are doing," said Bertie. "As a result, a lot of information involving you has been pumped into our system—so much so that we're experiencing an intelligence overload. I have been tasked to conduct an investigation into your company with a view to verifying what is true and what is false. My report will go directly to the SSC[164] for action. The police aren't worried about you but you have certainly upset DFA and MI."

I gave him free access to all our documentation and the lists of our employees. To his surprise, I also told him that I had started running my own intelligence collection operation to determine who in South Africa was cooperating with UNITA and providing them with illegal covert support, and gave him several of our own very pertinent

intelligence reports. After that, Bertie made it his business to call me whenever an item of 'intelligence' involving us was passed to them by MI, GS2, or Foreign Affairs. He also called me to verify any information NIS had received on UNITA and its South African supporters.

He would also soon begin to confirm many of my suspicions and much of what my own intelligence agents were reporting.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative Alioune Blondin Beye was involved In Angola's negotiations (Photo httpmaliactu.net)

13:
Planning the Redeployment of Forces

January 1994 was to herald the beginning of the end for UNITA on the battlefield. It was also to mark a dramatic escalation in the disinformation campaign against both EO and myself—a campaign that also gathered momentum beyond South Africa's shores. It appeared to me that the countries providing covert support to UNITA were the ones to shout the loudest. Non-government organisations that made their living from 'donor funds' also quietly encouraged UNITA to remain in conflict with the MPLA government. They must have been equally concerned; they were rapidly approaching their 'sell-by date' in Angola.

The generals still harboured grave doubts about the FAA being able to defeat UNITA, and they frequently reminded me that they didn't want the movement destroyed. They simply wanted UNITA's military forces to lay down their arms so that the war would end.

UNITA parade at Jamba. Note the Chinese Red Star on the door of the BM-21 (photo: Jim Hooper)

The military situation remained highly volatile. The FAA and UNITA were still engaged in heavy fighting in several provinces. The FAA's morale had plummeted as UNITA forces gained victory after victory, but as usual, it was the civilians who suffered most as the bloody conflict continued to escalate.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola, Alioune Blondin Beye, was becoming increasingly frustrated with the UN's lack of progress and UNAVEM II's obvious ineptitude where it came to ending hostilities between the MPLA and UNITA. The UN were also highly vocal against FAA but remarkably silent on UNITA.

Within South Africa the situation was becoming fluid as the first democratic general election, due in April 1994, approached. It was being contested by all political parties, but it was very clear from the outset that the African National Congress would emerge as the next government of South Africa.

There was growing discontent and anxiety within the armed forces as men who had served in frontline units feared they would become the next victims, not only of President

de Klerk's appeasing house-cleaning operations, but also of the soon-to-be new ANC government's anticipated restructuring efforts. This prompted many serving SADF soldiers and members of the SAP (both black and white) to resign from the services. Quite a few of them found their way to our doorstep and we were happy to welcome several into the company. Consequently it was relatively easy to blame Executive Outcomes for draining manpower from the armed forces and the police, including the SAP's disbanded counter- insurgency unit, Koevoet.

By then we had appointed Nic van den Bergh to take control of the Angolan project. I had first met Nic in 1978 at the Army Gymnasium at Heidelberg. At that time, he was a lieutenant in the Parachute Battalion and I a lieutenant in the Engineers. Although we had never worked together, our paths had occasionally crossed in the SWA/Angolan combat zone while I was with 32 Battalion's Reconnaissance Wing. Lafras and Nic, however, knew each other well and it was Lafras who suggested that we employ him to drive the project forward. By then, Nic had attained the rank of Commandant. I agreed to his appointment in the company.

***

On 4 January 1994 I submitted our Strategic Intelligence Summary (SIS 003/94) to Carl Dietz, our intelligence officer. The report had come from a very well-placed agent I was running in UNITA, and it read as follows:

According to UNITA, the FAA is still in an advanced state of combat preparation, and large amounts of weapons and equipment are being shipped into Angola via Luanda. UNITA also knows that FAA is in a retraining phase and much attention is being given to integrated actions between the Angolan Army and Air Force. The fact that South Africans are training FAA troops at Cabo Ledo has a demoralising effect on UNITA as they believe such FAA troops will easily defeat them on the battlefield.

Should the current negotiations fail, UNITA's planned strategy in Luanda and area is as follows:

- UNITA's special troops are to sabotage water and power supplies, government installations, government offices, the airport, and the harbour.
- Initiation and support of large-scale civil disobedience coupled with politicisation actions. Attention will be concentrated on the poor social structure, the economy, high inflation, food shortages, and shortages of medical equipment.
- Intensification of UNITA espionage activities.
- The creation of uncertainty within Luanda regarding personal safety. This will be achieved by the use of car bombs, letter bombs, and so on.

Other Military Actions:

- The final capture and consolidation of UNITA's position in Cuito (Bie) and Menongue.

• The recapture of diamond production areas not currently under UNITA control. Actions will especially be aimed at Lucapa and area with a purely economic objective.
• The intensification of reconnaissance against Cabo Ledo to monitor Executive Outcomes personnel. Military action against Cabo Ledo and individual members of Executive Outcomes is also being planned.
• Escalation of activities in the Benguela and Lobito areas to ensure that FAA is spread thinly on the ground.
• Infrastructure sabotage such as the bridge across the Cuanza River.
• The intensification of military actions in Northern Angola specifically aimed against Malanje and the route from there to Saurimo.

Reports like these enabled the FAA to pre-empt many UNITA actions. They also served as intelligence guidelines in support of joint planning sessions and appreciations of current and predicted UNITA actions.

It was by having foreknowledge of UNITA's plans and intentions that the men of EO were able to make accurate predictions about what to expect and where. These reports also played a role in determining how EO would eventually deploy from Cabo Ledo.

***

On 5 January 1994, I received a faxed letter from Bill Phaphe, the security superintendent for the Debswana Diamond Company. Although he had addressed the letter to Executive Outcomes Limited in the UK, he faxed it to me in Pretoria. I was surprised by the letter which was terse and to the point—very unlike my previous correspondence with Bill:

Attention: Mr Eeben Barlow Re: Termination of services

We regret to inform you that we have decided to terminate your services with our company with immediate effect.

We, of course, undertake to pay Executive Outcomes all outstanding monies for services rendered on receipt of the outstanding individual reports.

Thank you

B. W. Phaphe (signed)

Group Security Superintendent cc MDDMD

Brig Knoesen GM Orapa GM Jwaneng

Debswana's letter terminating EO's services with immediate effect after it became known we were in Angola assisting the FAA

I was astonished to see that the letter had been backdated to 4 January 1993 and phoned Bill to ask him about his sudden change of heart. I considered him a good friend and thought he at least owed me an explanation.

"I'm sorry. I've been instructed to break all contact with you," Bill said apologetically.

"Surely there must be a reason, Bill? You, yourself told me that you were highly satisfied with the work I was doing for Debswana. Why the sudden change?"

"Look, Eeben, please don't make this any more difficult for me. I'm only following orders from Johannesburg."

"Bill, does this have something to do with EO's involvement in Angola? My contract with the Angolans is perfectly legal. We aren't committing any crimes and we certainly aren't buying diamonds from UNITA or anyone else. What the hell is the reason?"

"I'm sorry."

"Okay, Bill, one last thing. Why is the letter backdated to 4 January 1993?" "I'm sorry. I've only done what I was told to do."

Losing the contract with Debswana was a bitter pill to swallow. I believed the media's negative reports about myself and the company might have had a role to play. I also suspected that Military Intelligence and the Department of Foreign Affairs had advised De Beers/Anglo American to break contact with me—and played a significant role in Bill's change of attitude. Perhaps others had too…as I would later discover.

Only they knew what had transpired and Bill wasn't about to tell me.

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Shortly after that I flew to Luanda to see General De Matos—a very proud man who I always enjoyed talking to, and who was determined to bring an end to the conflict in Angola. Continually wracked with malaria, De Matos was never one to waste time. After a brief handshake, a hug and a minute's worth of chit-chat, he got down to business.

Our initial discussion was almost a repeat of a different conversation I'd had with General Luis Faćeira a few weeks before.

"General, you must make provision for UNITA forces to be integrated into a unified Angolan Army," De Matos said. "They are not all Maoists like Savimbi. Many are good men and we'll need all the good men we can get once the war is over. We have to rebuild our country and put the war behind us. Some of their soldiers will also defend the 'new' Angola."

"Let's train the men and win the war first, General. We can worry about integrating UNITA later."

I then discussed how I foresaw a campaign strategy developing, and the importance and urgency of denying UNITA their source of illegal funding—the diamond fields and onshore oil installations. He listened intently and then responded.

"That's fine. Just remember, UNITA will have a role to play in redeveloping the country when this mess is over."

I was unsure about the direction our discussion was taking. Oddly enough the general abruptly changed the subject and asked for feedback on 16 Brigade's training at Rio Longa.

***

FAA's General Staff were not always able to visit the training area to monitor the programme so we decided to document it by taking video footage which would then be edited and sent to Luanda. This would also become a valuable training and debriefing aid.

To produce the videos we hired Kallie Coetzee, an ex-Armscor-cum-freelance video producer and editor, and got him to set up a studio for us. His efforts birthed a company named Gemini Video Productions. The media immediately assumed that Gemini was an EO 'front organisation',[165] despite them having no clue what a front organisation actually was. On the upside, this supposedly sinister role gave Kallie the feeling that he was a vital cog in the machine, and over time he produced some excellent material documenting the company's work in Angola.

Meanwhile, at Rio Longa, Brigadier Valeriano was becoming enthusiastic about what was being achieved by our training, and his attitude towards EO's men changed dramatically.

FAA Brigadier Valeriano observing 16 Brigade conventional training, Rio Longa

It also became apparent that he was beginning to feel like he was part of Executive Outcomes.

At one meeting he told me we had changed his life. For the first time in his military career he could see a marked difference in the attitude of the trainees. Morale had soared; the recruits were motivated and competing to become the best soldiers they could be. He said our training teams, despite difficult and trying circumstances, were performing an outstanding service and deserved every accolade they got.

Our men began to ask for spiritual and religious guidance so we started sending a padre to minister to their needs on Sundays. When he became aware of this, Brigadier Valeriano asked if he and his men could also attend our church parades.

The Angolans, most of whose parents were Roman Catholic, had been isolated from religion for so long that they found the sermons—conducted in English and Afrikaans—inspirational and comforting, despite not understanding those languages.

The irony of an Afrikaans-speaking padre[166] ministering to former South African soldiers and their erstwhile 'communist' enemies was not lost on us.

The next thing we knew, Valeriano was asking if it would be possible for us to provide his men with Bibles. Realising that if we appealed towards home for help we would be snubbed due to our bad press, we looked amongst ourselves.

Requests for contributions to the Bible fund brought astonishing results (some men contributed as much as US$1 000) and we were able to purchase enough Portuguese Bibles to satisfy the spiritual needs of the young Angolan troops. Despite many hardly being able to read, they seemed to find solace just in clutching the Holy Book. They also appreciated that men they had come to fear over the years were now actively contributing to their welfare.

Video briefings were regularly sent to Luanda as the training progressed. The videos must have pricked the generals' curiosity because they let Nic van den Bergh know that they intended to visit the training area and inspect, first hand, the transformation of the newly reformed 16 Brigade. The distinguished inspection team comprised General De

Matos, Generals Luis and Antonio Faćeira; Air Force General Pedro Neto, and the FAA's Inspector General.

General J De Matos, Chief of Staff (FAA), the author, and Nic van den Berg, Rio Longa, 1994

Nic gave the generals a comprehensive briefing on the training programme (most of it completely alien to the old Soviet tactics, techniques, and procedures the Angolans had been using) and spoke about the many shortages we were experiencing and the problems we still needed to overcome. I think his briefing played a major role in establishing an increasing foundation of trust with the General Staff.

From Cabo Ledo they were taken for a tour of the lecture areas, ammunition depots, and stores at the base area our men had established at Rio Longa, and viewed various demonstrations laid on for them.

Later, they were invited to sit on a hill overlooking the demonstration area. A sand model was used to brief them on what would be happening. Suddenly, from almost between their field chairs, a sniper who had waited silent and unmoving in the blazing sun for more than an hour, commenced firing at a target. The generals were visibly shocked about not having been aware of the sniper until he fired his first shot.

They watched section and platoon attacks on a target area with the support of direct and indirect weapons such as heavy machine guns, RPGs, and mortars. They were amazed by the high standard of discipline, field craft, and fire control. At the conclusion of the exercise they burst into spontaneous applause and congratulated Nic and Oom Hennie. They also made it clear that they wanted to see the retrained 16 Brigade committed operationally in the near future.

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Sometime in early January, rumours that some of the men within the company were engaged in illegal activities reached my ears. Angola was awash with weapons, diamonds, and other tradable commodities (while seriously short of food and consumer goods). Some of our men were apparently attempting to supplement their income by buying diamonds cheaply and selling them in South Africa at huge profits. Sadly, greed can be a vicious temptation and it soon got the better of them. It was clear that those involved didn't

understand the company's precarious situation. If the Angolan General Staff got wind of a purported diamond-smuggling racket, there was a good chance they would summarily cancel our contract. This would destroy the company and its reputation and deprive many outstanding soldiers of their jobs. Given the media's growing distaste for us and their penchant for sensationalism, exposure of one man would automatically brand us all as diamond smugglers.

I was still smarting from the abrupt termination of my services by Debswana and I had no intention of tolerating any illegal activities within the company. I was also painfully aware that smuggled diamonds were fuelling and paying for the bloody and protracted war we were trying to stop, while at the same time making the unscrupulous very rich.

I arranged to meet General Itha, the FAA's Chief of Intelligence, and we discussed the issue frankly. He was grateful for the information, but threw the ball back into my court and suggested I deal with it in whatever way would cause the least embarrassment and fewest problems for the FAA, EO, and MPLA.

"Okay, General, we'll deal with it," I said, "but if things get out of hand, I might ask you to allow us to arrest the culprits and have them tried in Angola."

I needed to give General Itha this option even though I hoped it would never come to that; if it did, we would certainly be accused of harbouring diamond smugglers.

"We can put them before a military court if it becomes necessary," the general agreed.

I raised the subject with Nico and Lafras and we agreed to recruit some men with clean reputations and secretly task them to identify and report anyone involved in illegal trade. It was sad that we were forced to spy on our own men but the culprits were soon identified.

When they boarded an aircraft at Cabo Ledo to return to South Africa, we notified the SAP at Wierda Bridge Police Station and they had officers waiting to search the suspects at Lanseria Airport when they landed. When diamonds and other contraband were found, the traffickers were promptly arrested and their services with the company were immediately terminated. The would-be diamond smugglers were soon released after having agreed to pay a substantial fine. I hoped they had learnt a valuable lesson and that the story of their fate would bounce back to Angola. It did, and attempts at smuggling diamonds appeared to stop.

We later appointed our own security staff to search all personnel boarding aircraft bound for South Africa. On one occasion I had to fire three men, two of them good friends of mine and highly competent soldiers. We were not in Angola to steal diamonds and I would not allow the company's resources to be used for illegal activities.

Lanseria Airport has subsequently undergone a major facelift (photo: Travelstart.co.za)

A rumour was then circulated amongst certain journalists that we were bribing customs and immigration officials at Lanseria Airport to turn a blind eye to 'EO's smuggling'. Ironically, when we had started using that airport, no customs or immigration officials had even been based there. It was only at our insistence that the Directorate Civil Aviation, the Reserve Bank, and the Receiver of Revenue had relented and finally opened a customs and immigration office. This had made us quite unpopular with other cross-border operators who were also using Lanseria, but we got along well with the officials and went out of our way to cooperate with them. The suggestion that we were bribing them was as ludicrous as it was malicious.

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Over time, I established an excellent working relationship with General Itha. Tall, well built, and serious about his work, Itha was struggling to keep abreast of the enemy his country was dealing with and the support it was receiving from outside of Angola.

Although Itha did not smile often, he was always friendly and helpful, and our meetings were always preceded with coffee and small talk. On many an occasion he told me he had nothing to smile about. When he became aware of the fact that I was running my own 'intelligence service', we started exchanging notes and he often asked me to predict UNITA's next move.

Anyone working in the field of covert and clandestine operations knows that if an enemy's funding is cut off, it is only a matter of time before they wither and grind to a halt. Without finance, their procurement of equipment and logistical routes becomes increasingly difficult, and in their desperation to obtain resources, they will start making mistakes. We could exploit those mistakes. I set out to impress this upon General Itha in a way that wouldn't make him take offence at me trying to tell him what to do. Once he had accepted my argument, I knew that he would air the issue with General De Matos, with whom I had already discussed this approach. I suspected that De Matos would translate it into action against UNITA in due course. I also knew that De Matos and his staff would turn to our senior personnel to assist him in planning such action.

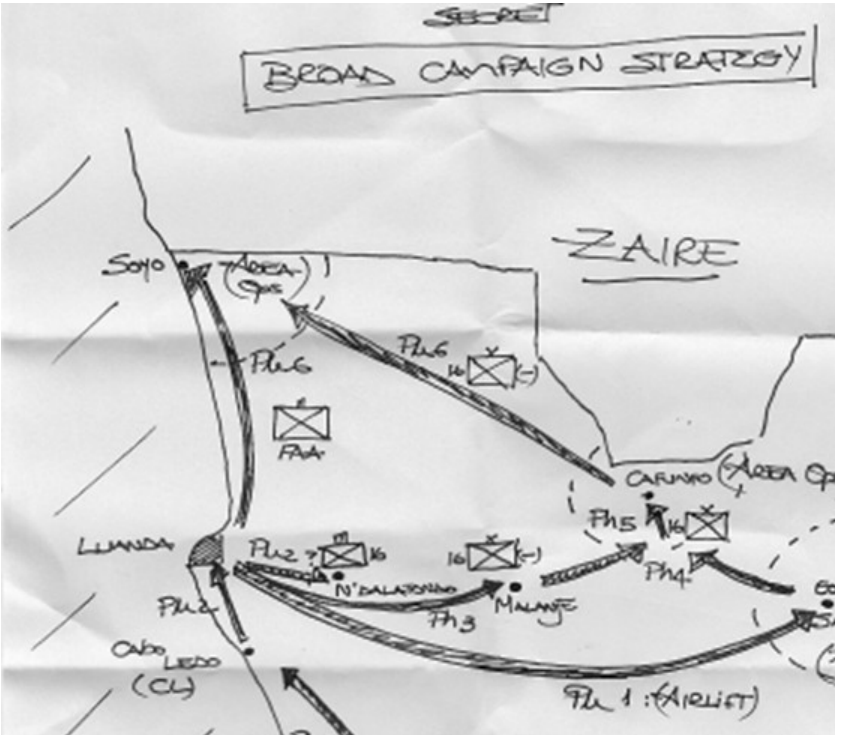
"So what are you really telling me?" Itha asked.

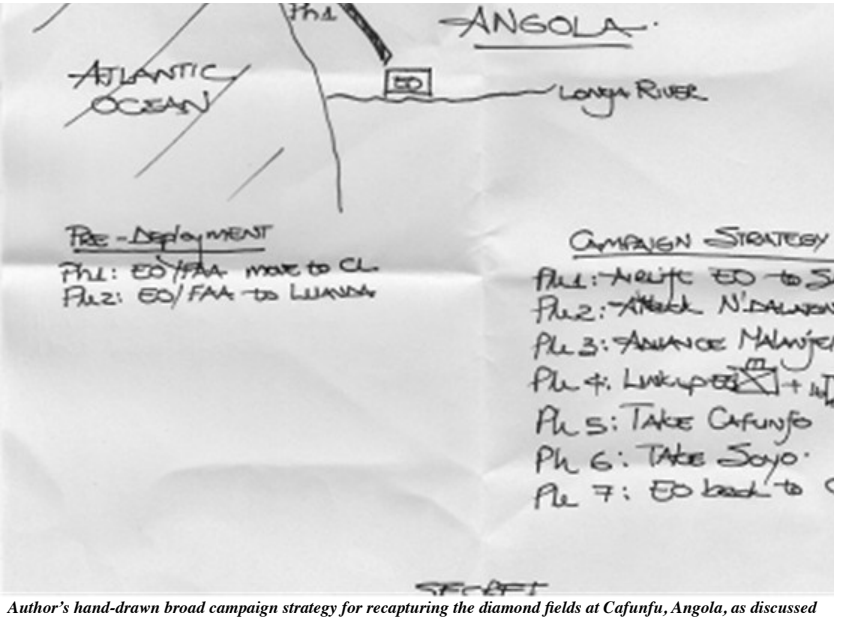
"I'm saying FAA should launch an attack against a small UNITA outpost and win a convincing victory. This will boost morale throughout the army. Build on that morale and then go for the big prize—the larger diamond areas in the north. If UNITA loses those fields, they won't be able to sustain their war effort for very long and we will bleed them bankrupt on the battlefield."

"And you think we can do it?"

"Of course you can. There's no doubt in my mind that if my men are involved in some of the planning and assist FAA with battlefield advice, we can deal UNITA a massive body blow. The important thing is that once the diamond fields are retaken by 16 Brigade, they must be held at all costs to deprive UNITA of revenue. A shortage of cash will soon see their war efforts wither and collapse."

I then sketched out a map of how I envisaged the campaign strategy to recapture the diamond fields from UNITA unfolding. This we discussed at some length and Itha made several notes on my views and comments. He undertook to discuss this with Generals De Matos and Faćeira.





Author's hand-drawn broad campaign strategy for recapturing the diamond fields at Cafunfu, Angola, as discussed with General Itha

I also wanted FAA to hold Cafunfu at all costs while another 16 Brigade battle group swept westwards towards Soyo (since retaken by UNITA after EO left there in mid-June 1993) to secure that harbour.

"General Faćeira told me that you believe this is the way to proceed some time ago. I will see what I can do."

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By late-January, the FAA and EO commenced joint intelligence and operational planning sessions. These were conducted in the old Portuguese colonial fort in Luanda[167] which had a magnificent view across the Bay of Luanda. It was here that several of our senior personnel, together with their Angolan counterparts, started planning for victory against UNITA on the battlefield.

The old fort also housed its own surprises. On my first visit to this magnificent structure, I was surprised to see several SADF vehicles parked there. They had been captured during operations against invading SADF forces, I was told. There was also a small military museum of which the Angolans were very proud. Displayed were several items of SADF equipment captured in battles against us. There was a rumour that an

SADF boot on display still had a foot inside it. I again realised the irony of the situation. Here I was discussing past battles with the 'enemy' and cooperating to find a way to save the country from South Africa's old 'ally'—UNITA.

Also used as a war museum, the fort held its own surprises. An SADF Buffel recovered from the battlefield on exhibit (photo: Tripadvisor.co.za)

I recall one cool evening standing outside the fort with General De Matos, overlooking Luanda with its lights illuminating the night. He placed a hand on my shoulder and asked, "What do you think of our city, General?" I told him it was a beautiful city and would be even more striking with a lick of paint. He smiled and said, "Maybe one day—soon".

Our team at the fort worked under the command of Nic van den Bergh and Chris Grové, another ex-paratrooper officer. Chris had joined EO shortly after Nic.

Nic, as the commander of the Angolan programme, was ranked as a brigadier and Chris as a colonel. Working closely with their FAA counterparts, my men soon built up a fairly reliable picture of the situation on the ground throughout the country and could point out many operational and tactical deficiencies in the FAA's arsenal using various overlays and intelligence reports. The main weaknesses were out-of-date or inadequate battlefield intelligence, laborious command and control procedures, and the lack of coordinated close air support accompanied by accurate direct and indirect fire from heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars, and artillery. Their doctrine was also outdated and inadequate and several of their TTPs[168] were unsound. It was around this time that I realised we would need to rethink our approach to conflict and war if we were to decisively defeat UNITA's forces on the battlefield. Many years later I would write several of the lessons learnt in Composite Warfare.[169]

We knew that there were huge gaps in the FAA's intelligence at the strategic and operational levels. We also knew from past operations that the FAA had little or no intelligence capability on the battlefield, especially when engaged in fast and hard- hitting mechanised and motorised warfare. Given the terrain, this crucial missing element made them vulnerable to the array of anti-armour weaponry that UNITA invariably deployed against them Coupled with this was the FAA's lack of determined close air support, accurate direct and indirect fire, and aerial reconnaissance in support of mobile operations.

The key to defeating UNITA would be the ability to make lightning strikes against targets where they least expected them. FAA did not have that capability or skill— yet.

My men were rectifying that. However, the MPLA and its intelligence organs needed to seize the informational environment and made it widely known when the FAA attained battlefield successes and captured or destroyed UNITA strongholds.

Carl Dietz, our senior intelligence officer, was tasked to twist the generals' arms and convince them to give the responsibility for aerial reconnaissance to EO. If this crucial asset was not correctly deployed and interpreted, both our men and theirs would be blind on the battlefield. Good aerial reconnaissance would allow us to monitor UNITA's vehicular movements and locate their artillery and gun emplacements, troop deployments, and reserve areas, and register potential attack targets.

Carl discussed the importance of aerial reconnaissance with General De Matos and Joaquim David of Sonangol, which would be involved in financing such a project. They soon came to realise the enormous benefits of an eye-in-the-sky capability and at a subsequent meeting, the General Staff agreed to our recommendation. EO would become responsible for the command and control of aerial photo and video reconnaissance, data interpretation, and the dissemination of intelligence.

Our plan for an effective airborne surveillance capability was simple. We required a Beechcraft King Air 200 fitted with high-speed still cameras, a high-resolution colour television camera and a forward-looking infra-red system (FLIR) which would enable our surveillance and interpretation team to observe targets by day and by night, regardless of ground conditions. The equipment would be operated by men experienced in the application of the technology. The project was dubbed Project Leo.

The project got under way as soon as final approval had been granted by General De Matos, and the King Air 200, with its 'PW' registration, was promptly dubbed 'Papa Whisky'. Much time and effort was spent sourcing equipment (both in South Africa and abroad) which was then fitted to Papa Whisky in great secrecy, and we were soon able to fly our first test flights. The results were astonishing, even to us.

To support Papa Whisky and Project Leo, a dedicated film processing laboratory and video editing suite was established within the Angolan army's HQ in Luanda. The acquisition of Papa Whisky was about to give EO and the FAA a real-time battlefield intelligence capability for the first time. Despite a few teething problems, Papa Whisky was soon ready for deployment on operational duties and would soon prove its worth under the able command of Theuns Marais.

In his Continent Ablaze: The insurgency wars in Africa 1960 to the present, John Turner illustrated the development of the Angola Civil War. The first phase, from 1976–1978, was characterised by:

- The assumption of most of the MPLA's combat responsibilities and practically all of its combat support/combat service support responsibilities by SWAPO, and Cuban and other forces.
- Organisation of FAPLA into a conventional force based on the brigade system.
- Attempts by the MPLA and the Cubans to promote a hearts-and-minds campaign that failed because of UNITA's counter-activities.

• The establishment by SWAPO of bases and a logistical network in south- western Angola with FAPLA and Cuban assistance.
• The elimination of the FNLA as a fighting force.
• The initial regrouping of UNITA in the central highlands.
• UNITA's decision to form a large insurgent force.
• The gradual extension, with South African assistance, of UNITA control into Cuando Cubango province.

Turner characterised the second phase, from 1978–1983, as follows:

• The Cubans withdrew from most combat operations, instead providing garrison and other support activities.
• For political purposes Cuban troop strength was increased.
• FAPLA assumed combat responsibilities for which it was not ready. Poor COIN capabilities allowed UNITA's operations to spread.
• South African intervention against SWAPO bases in south-west Angola continued.
• The Soviet Union increased its military assistance to the MPLA because it was facing a continuously deteriorating security situation.
• UNITA established territorial control in south-eastern Angola and began extending operations to the north and west.
• UNITA began to receive substantial support from South Africa and other nations via Namibia.

The third and final phase, from 1984–1988, was illustrated as follows:

• Massive outside military assistance to opposing FAPLA and UNITA forces by their backers.
• Build-up of FAPLA ground forces to a strength of 100 000 in 70 or so brigades.
• Large FAPLA conventional operations against UNITA-held territory in regions of eastern, central, and south-eastern Angola.
• Extensive use of air support in an attempt to adapt Soviet doctrine and tactics to FAPLA's needs.
• Peaking of Cuban troop strength at about 65 000 in 1988.
• UNITA's expansion to a force of about 65 000 during 1987–1988.
• Extension of regular UNITA operations into all provinces of Angola.
• Development by UNITA of improved anti-aircraft and anti-armour units.
• Direct South African military intervention in support of UNITA.

The FAA generals firmly believed they were still engaged in a continuation of what Turner viewed as their third and final phase—the civil war against UNITA. The only difference, according to them, was that the SADF was no longer overtly supporting UNITA; they were doing it covertly. They regarded Dr Savimbi's return to war after having lost the 1992 elections as part of this final phase. I disagreed with their assessment of Savimbi's return to war, but, we also understood that, given the immense pressure the

FAA were under, they had fallen into UNITA's trap. This made them unable to think outside the box.

The joint planning sessions continued at the fort. EO's staff had to change the FAA's mind-set to successfully orchestrate a turn of the war in their favour. This was not easy, but using careful and detailed appreciations of the prevailing situation, strength levels, FAA and UNITA deployments, and overall support in combat operations, they slowly managed to change the FAA's views on the direction the war should take.

Although UNITA publicly boasted that they controlled more than 80% of Angola, the planners were soon able to point out that this was untrue. The mere absence of the FAA in certain areas did not imply that UNITA dominated those areas. When the FAA officers realised the implications of what they were being told, they saw UNITA's boasts of impending victory on the battlefield in a rather different light. This was crucial as it made the FAA believe that they could indeed defeat UNITA.

A UNITA political office in Southern Angola (photo: Jim Hooper)

Using the skills they had learnt on numerous SADF courses combined with blood-and-sweat combat experience, our men spent long days and late nights putting together a comprehensive appreciation of the strategic and operational situation. Backing up their arguments were FAA intelligence reports as well as those from EO's office, from where I was already running agents in UNITA.

When all available intelligence was pooled, it allowed them to extrapolate UNITA's current and future intentions. UNITA's logistic areas, supply routes, deployment areas, and much more, were carefully plotted on overlays to provide a clearer picture of the situation. Initial attack targets were also identified.

In support of our work in Angola, my Strategic Intelligence Group from Pretoria was infiltrating or penetrating MI, the DFA's UNITA desk, UNITA itself, and many of its sympathisers. All of the SIG's intelligence was fed to Carl Dietz who, in turn, used it to complement his own intelligence ground coverage. The SIG's reports were also passed on to General Itha for information purposes.

The threatening letter from the Rooiberg police station had opened a new intelligence front for me and I had begun to talentspot possible agents within the police.

My agents were tasked to monitor EO related intelligence emanating from those organisations, give me feedback on UNITA's responses and intentions, and supply details regarding their covert dealings with these organisations and other commercial enterprises. They also monitored known UNITA sympathisers in South Africa, Namibia, and elsewhere.

Using the steady stream of incoming and available intelligence and past combat actions as a reference, my men were able to do a fairly detailed analysis and assess UNITA's strong and weak points.

A major problem our men identified was that the FAA was fighting defensive battles and had lost both the initiative and the ability to conduct offensive operations. This gave UNITA opportunities to seize, hold, and exploit the initiative on the battlefield. This situation would only change if the FAA adopted a more offensive posture coupled to aggressive and relentless action.

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On 10 January, Colonels Hennie Blaauw, Rolf van Heerden, and Mike Herbst were summoned to Cabo Ledo to provide input into planned operations against UNITA.

Rolf was well-versed in mechanised warfare and Mike in armoured operations. Oom Hennie, never one to bow to anyone's plans if he believed they were inadequate, voiced his disapproval of the campaign strategy. He would later recall:

I had studied the area from the available maps and examined the operational problem. As we [Executive Outcomes] believed that fast-moving forces with adequate fire support (both air and ground) would be able to rapidly overwhelm and surprise UNITA, I presented a different option to the planners. My recommendation was that 16 Brigade advance on Malanje and consolidate its position there. Using Malanje as a firm base we would mount a massive air and ground strike, rapidly strengthened by a heliborne assault on Cafunfu. The FAA and Nic and his team didn't like my plan as they believed it posed too much risk for the heliborne forces, as well as creating a logistical nightmare that the FAA would be unable to cope with.

Oom Hennie's summation of what he considered a more feasible option was immediately rejected. Although his option would immediately have denied UNITA access to their funding via the diamond fields at Cafunfu, the FAA were not yet able to field a comprehensive support system or launch a well-coordinated air strike / heliborne assault. Timing is a crucial factor in executing the type of operation Oom Hennie envisaged too, and Nic and his team doubted the FAA's ability to adhere to a strict time schedule. I, on the other hand, believed that a combination of the options would be most successful but we lacked the ability and assets with which to conduct a large-scale heliborne assault. This

resulted in me agreeing with Nic's more cautious approach. Oom Hennie later told me that if he'd had a blunt knife at hand, he would have stabbed me.

Nic and his planning team continued to work on their deployment options and a week later they were ready to present a three-phase plan, which was summarised as follows:

Phase 1: 16 Brigade, minus one battle group, and its equipment would be airlifted from Luanda to Saurimo (an isolated FAA garrison in eastern Angola).

Phase 2: One battle group with its own logistical support would advance from Luanda to Malanje, open the routes, and consolidate its position at Malanje. Phase 3: Cafunfu would be recaptured using the forces from phases 1 and 2 in a pincer movement from east and west.

Although not completely opposed to the plan, Oom Hennie had misgivings about its feasibility, especially as far as the drive from Luanda to Malanje was concerned. He later expressed his doubts to me:

To advance with one battle group from Luanda to Malanje, a distance of more than 350 kilometres, will present its own unique set of problems. Apart from moving through areas very definitely under UNITA control, the battle group will be mainly road-bound because of the terrain. This will make them easy targets for UNITA's anti-armour weaponry. You know as well as I that one cannot always fix a shit plan with firepower. Executive Outcomes' command and control group will have to be split up so as to distribute men throughout the columns; it is clear the FAA want us to move with the men of 16 Brigade. There are just too many possible hurdles and we haven't had the time to get 16 Brigade truly combat- ready.

Oom Hennie later elaborated:

I disagreed entirely with the plan as it was not feasible.

UNITA needed the diamond fields to be able to finance the war—so everything they did depended on diamonds. I appreciated that they would ring the area with steel to deter any attempts to recapture it. After all, we were the ones who had taught them how to defend and delay FAA forces when we were still in the SADF. They would use every tactic we had taught them—penetration night-attacks, stand-off bombardments, nuisance minefields, tank-hunting teams—the whole shooting match. Following Dolphin's plan, we would have been fucked up very quickly. The plan gave UNITA every advantage they could have hoped for.

Dolphin was Nic van den Bergh's codename. All senior EO staff used code names during radio communications to conceal identities and to confuse Military Intelligence intercepts as to who was where. We assumed that whatever MI intercepted would be passed on to UNITA anyway.

Nic saw the proposed plan differently:

General De Matos and his planning staff wanted to see what type of plan we would come up with. We were still not fully trusted by them at the time and they had already made up their minds about a plan. I wasn't at all amused by Hennie's comments and said so. I had been ordered (rather forced) by De Matos to follow FAA's option.[170] We had to follow his orders if it was at all possible— and convert them into action—and I told Hennie so. If he wanted to sulk, that was his problem, not mine.

It was during these planning sessions and subsequent discussions that the first small cracks began to appear in the top echelons of EO. Nic and his planning team didn't always see eye-to-eye with Oom Hennie and his team. In fairness, Oom Hennie and his team frequently failed to present their disagreements with much diplomacy. While both teams had the same objective—training the 16 Brigade and rapidly defeating UNITA—their approaches differed vastly. Nic wanted a cautious deployment while Oom Hennie advocated a quick and daring one. I, on the other hand, at that stage much of a 'backroom boy', gave my views to Generals De Matos and Itha and hoped that they, in turn, would task my men accordingly.

Oom Hennie had a wealth of experience working with black soldiers while Nic lacked that understanding. Coming from an all-white parachute unit environment, Nic couldn't be entirely blamed for his lack of insight. However, it eventually led to tensions between him and several of the FAA senior officers as well as with black EO personnel. Nic was the type of commander who (once he had a mission and a plan with the inputs he had requested) made it clear in no uncertain terms that his plan would be followed with no more than minor deviations. Oom Hennie viewed this as a lack of flexibility.

News of these disagreements quickly found their way to our offices in Pretoria and Lafras took the next flight to Cabo Ledo to negotiate a resolution. We couldn't afford to have our senior officers arguing with each other; nor could we allow the FAA to realise that there was dissension in our ranks.

Lafras reported that the disagreements seemed to be very minor, but it was clear to him that the FAA General Staff were putting a lot of pressure on Nic to develop and implement a campaign strategy with a subsequent feasible operational design. Being conscious of the negative media reporting on EO, Nic was anxious to resolve the military impasse as quickly as possible in case South Africa coerced the Angolan government into making us leave Angola. As the EO commander in Angola, Nic felt he could not discuss what he saw as 'his problems' with his officers. Instead, he bore the brunt of their misgivings and at times, even their anger. Lafras and I supported Nic's view but recommended some minor changes to his planned campaign strategy.

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The media campaign against EO escalated steadily. It was apparent that several selected journalists were being courted by the SADF and Foreign Affairs and given 'exclusive intelligence' from 'unattributable sources'. The more sensational the story, the more

weight it carried. These journalists often approached me for comment and demanded answers to questions like:

- Had Executive Outcomes initially worked for UNITA but switched sides because the FAA had offered us more money?
- Was it true that a lack of food and our poor logistics management had driven our men to cannibalism?
- Were we secretly training right-wing murder squads in Angola for later deployment into South Africa?
- Were we secretly training APLA hit teams in South Africa?
- Why were we destabilising Angola and trying to prevent a peaceful resolution to the decades-long civil war?
- Were we engaged in diamond and ivory smuggling from Angola and thus destabilising an already fragile economy?

One reporter even claimed to have interviewed me in a hotel in France. That I hadn't been anywhere near France at the time was apparently irrelevant.

We were also approached by several local and foreign journalists who offered to write positive articles provided we paid them. A couple of female journalists made more suggestive approaches, but none of us were that desperate. We promptly made it our policy not to pay any bribes (financial or otherwise) to the media.

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Around 12 September, our fax machine spat out 29 copies of an SADF document from different locations throughout South Africa. It was classified 'secret' and marked for the exclusive attention of all unit commanders at battalion and regimental level. In essence it was a regurgitation of General Georg Meiring's purposely misleading media statement of 10 September 1993, but it contained several new enlightening and misleading statements such as:

- EO was of grave concern to the SADF and it was in the national interest that the company be closed down as soon as possible.
- We were telling people wanting to join the company that they would be guarding oil wells when in fact they were being recruited to fight under the FAA's flag.
- EO was acting in blatant contravention of South Africa's foreign exchange laws.
- EO were actively contravening South Africa's taxation laws and our men were going to be investigated for income tax offences.
- EO was acting in complete disregard of international law.
- Unit commanders were to do everything they could to dissuade their personnel from joining EO, and it was in the SADF's best interests to remove us from Angola.

Although the document consisted of blatant lies, one had to ponder what business the SADF had in Angola in late 1993 and early 1994. To be blunt we didn't give a damn about

the opinions of MI, DFA, and the media. Our contract lay with the Angolans, not the South Africans.

However, I was extremely concerned that there might be a more sinister agenda behind the faxes. It was possible that we were being set up by someone who would later claim that we had secret SADF documents in our possession, and they might then attempt to insinuate that we were also engaged in espionage against the state. This would give them every reason to take decisive action against EO and close us down. The resultant media fall-out could very possibly destroy the company.

I called the SAP and asked them to come and remove every copy of the fax but not before reading and copying it.

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The press came up with a different slant on our activities too. There were reports about our impossible 'suicide mission' and they even drafted the opinion of Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the founder of 32 Battalion. Other 'experts', some who apparently knew more about the company and the contract than I did, were also quizzed and gave their opinions on the legality of our contract. They surmised that UNITA would regard us as 'over-the-hill soldiers', totally out of our depth, ignoring the fact that we had successfully fought them off at Soyo. We had undergone another transformation—from 'Springbok team' to 'over-the-hill soldiers'. It was obvious that this statement had been made for UNITA's benefit.

The media also claimed that UNITA would crush us and that all our men had placed their lives, as well as the lives of their families, in extreme danger. I could only speculate that someone was feeding them information calculated to scare off potential applicants to the company but as before, the more negative the media, the more men came forward to join Executive Outcomes. I got calls and faxes from the UK, the US, Spain, Portugal, Israel, and even Russia. Thys Pelser was likewise overwhelmed by applications from foreign servicemen wanting to join the company. However, the only soldiers we were in the market for were those who had served, either in the SADF, the police unit Koevoet, or the ANC's MK, and who had been so viciously betrayed.

The press, despite their dishonesty, were providing us with the best free advertising we could ever have hoped for.

EO instructor on the range at Rio Longa with a 12,7mm

(Photo Deon Rudolph)

EO instructors relaxing at a restaurant near Rio Longa, Angola, 1993
(Photo D Rudolph)

14:
The Start of the 1994 Offensive

A flurry of messages crisscrossed the ether from Pretoria to Luanda, Cabo Ledo, and Rio Longa. The FAA General Staff had tentatively approved the joint FAA/ EO campaign strategy and supporting operational designs to defeat UNITA on the battlefield. The success of the strategy would pave the way for a cease-fire and a political settlement to the decades long civil war in Angola.

Communities outside the larger cities had virtually been cut off from aid and assistance due to the fighting. Thousands of people (especially the elderly and young children) were starving, and in many places the rate of malnutrition was above 35%. The UN kept talking about peace, but did very little to stem the flow of weapons and equipment to UNITA, despite its proclaimed sanctions against the organisation.

According to UN press statements, peace talks in Lusaka, Zambia were progressing well. By 31 January, after protracted negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA, several general and specific principles concerning the deployment and role of the police in Angola were agreed upon.

UNAVEM II, however, was becoming increasingly impotent and UNITA was using the talks as an opportunity to build up and rearm its forces in preparation for a large-scale offensive. This was common knowledge to everyone in Angola except UNAVEM II.

The time for talk was rapidly approaching its end as far as the FAA was concerned. We had spent many months trying to convince the FAA General Staff of that fact, and they had finally come to realise the importance of cutting off UNITA's supply of money. Lafras and I had also continued to impress on them the importance of focussed, timely, and accurate intelligence that would allow predictions to be made about UNITA's intentions, locations, and external support in and around Cafunfu.

Subsequent to our meetings in late December 1993 and early January 1994, Lafras and I established our own rapid deployment force (RDF). We realised (thanks to media claims that we would be spearheading an advance on Jamba) that our men would probably find themselves in grave danger once the offensive began. We couldn't allow them to become UNITA targets so we decided to be proactive and fight fire with fire. We envisaged an RDF of company strength comprising a balanced combat team with its own integral air support. We presented our concept to General Luis Faćeira who, despite initial misgivings, agreed to its formation.

Members of EO's Rapid Reaction Force, Saurimo

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On 4 February 1994, Nic van den Bergh began implementing the first phases of the campaign to destroy UNITA on the battlefield. The proposed jumping off point was Saurimo in eastern Angola, approximately 800 kilometres east of Luanda. Known as Henrique de Carvalho in Portuguese colonial times, it was home to an isolated FAA garrison which, left much to itself and almost cut off from support, maintained a posture of static defence.

Our men would accompany 16 Brigade on its advance north to the diamond fields, but would be kept together as a cohesive unit rather than being dispersed amongst the FAA's units. We realised that the media (having very helpfully been urged to do so by MI and DFA) would claim that we were retaking the diamond fields to enrich ourselves, but we could not afford to let their lack of understanding of strategy and the essence of the Trinity of Gravity[171] distract us. Meanwhile the training of FAA's 16 Brigade continued in earnest at Rio Longa. Some elements of FAA would later receive training elsewhere as the date for the commencement of the campaign approached.

In the early morning of 5 February, a small EO advance party (ex-Special Forces officer Duncan Rykaard—who would be the operations officer at Saurimo—Carl Dietz, the intelligence officer, and a communications and protection element) left Luanda and flew to Saurimo. Its mission was to conduct a detailed reconnaissance of the FAA garrison and surrounds to confirm that the town would make a suitable jumping off point for future operations, particularly those aimed at the diamond fields in the Lunda Norte Province. I appreciated that our occupation of Saurimo would make UNITA uncertain of our true intentions and thus hopefully throw them off balance. The objective of the campaign was to capture and hold Cafunfu, but the media advised UNITA that we intended to take Jamba. To counter this move, UNITA would need to disperse its forces over a wide front, making them easy targets for attack and annihilation.

It took the battered old Soviet AN-26 aircraft the best part of two bumpy hours to get there but the flight gave the men the opportunity to observe the kind of terrain they would be operating in from the air.

Angolan AN-26—similar to the aircraft that flew the EO advance party to Saurimo (photo: unknown)

The sight that met them on the ground at Saurimo shocked them.

The once well-maintained Cuban Air Force base and its facilities had been badly neglected. It was filthy and run-down, and it looked more like a rubbish tip than a military base. Unserviceable and damaged aircraft, rusting hulls of armoured vehicles and tanks, old fuel bowsers, vehicle parts, and other waste lay scattered around the area. Grass that hadn't been cut for some time failed to hide the mess.

The air traffic control tower was in an equally sorry state; its equipment had been plundered or damaged beyond recognition, the walls were coated with grime, and the windows were broken. Yet far from being an abandoned facility, it was actually an operational garrison—which said little for the FAA's discipline.

The FAA garrison commander, General Sukissa, was friendly, helpful, and hospitable, and assured my men of his support. Carl recalled:

One could never have dreamt that a pretty serious war was raging. We were met by the governor general of the Lunda Sul province and several other Angolan dignitaries who had been anxiously awaiting our arrival. We got the whole red carpet treatment, so much so that we began to feel as though we had already single-handedly won the war.

After some polite chitchat we were entertained for lunch. Given the circumstances it was bizarre. We were dining as their guests with waiters on call, while only a few kilometres away troops were dying in the field. Duncan and I felt uncomfortable when the thought occurred to us, but we still enjoyed the meal and the Portuguese wine that went with it.

We were really made too comfortable and the conversation drifted through many subjects, the least of which was the war. The copious quantities of wine on the table made it all seem trivial, but it was a war that was devastating the Angolans. Nevertheless they seemed to bear it with remarkable stoicism.

It struck us as deeply ironic that the people we had been told were the enemy only a few short years before, were now sitting with us and talking as though we had never faced each other on the battlefield.

After a good night's rest we were given a tour of what would become our base at Saurimo. It consisted of a series of dilapidated buildings and hangers, all built around a soccer field—probably by the Cubans. Their air force had indeed operated out of Saurimo during their Angolan campaign and I remember thinking they would probably have wept if they saw what had happened to it. Later we met General Sukissa and his staff for further discussions and they promised to assist us in every possible way. Feeling somewhat pleased with ourselves, Duncan and I took our leave and clambered back into the AN-26 to return to Luanda.

The advance party arrived back in Luanda on 6 February and were debriefed by Nic van den Bergh. When I met Nic shortly afterwards he said Duncan and his team had confirmed Saurimo as the perfect starting point for the campaign to recapture Cafunfu and the diamond fields. He also advised me that UNITA would probably interpret our movement to Saurimo as the start of an advance on Jamba or Cafunfu.

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Lafras showed me a letter, written in early January, containing several false and scathing statements about EO. The source of the document was a friend of his who worked for a Midrand-based company that specialised in political analysis and strategy. According to Lafras, his friend was also very closely associated with both Military Intelligence and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The document had been written on the letterhead of a company called Strategic Concepts (Pty) Ltd, addressed to Peter Gush[172] of the Anglo American Corporation, and signed by one Mister Sean Cleary, a gentleman I had been wondering (and warned) about for a long time. In addition to his wildly spurious claims about EO, Cleary also expressed concern about our presence in Angola and stated that we should be forced out of that country as soon as possible.

I wondered why Anglo-American would even have been interested in Cleary's letter about us, or for that matter, concerned about our activities in Angola as it had no known mining operations there. I had a lot to learn.

Lafras suggested I take over his source as an agent and arranged to bring him to my office at 23:00 that night.

I couldn't help wondering how long Cleary had been advising Gush on EO for, and if it was this type of counsel that had forced Bill Phaphe of Debswana to terminate my services.

Nico Palm inserted a new tape into our covert video recorder, checked the cameras and microphones that covered every nook and cranny of our boardroom, and locked the cabinets that housed the recording equipment.

When Lafras arrived with his source, my surprise could not have been more complete. The informant turned out to be a former 32 Battalion platoon commander who I had met in Angola several years earlier.

Johann Smith had lost a leg during a bunker clearing operation that had also cost the lives of two of his men. I clearly remembered our first meeting. At the time I had been briefly attached to a 32 Battalion company as a sapper, and I had warned Johann that a booby trap could turn a bunker into a death trap if it was approached incorrectly. Despite my suggestions about what the correct approach should have been, it was a booby trap that caught Johann and his platoon. He later served as a junior military attaché in Angola and afterwards became an MI liaison officer with UNITA.

Johann Smith alongside a UNITA tank in Angola (photo: unknown)

"Good to see you, Johann," I said, trying to hide my surprise as I shook his hand. "My God, Eeben," he said, laughing, "I never thought I'd be coming to see you at

your offices. Just imagine that."

I showed him to a seat that was precisely positioned for the best possible video and audio coverage.

After exchanging pleasantries and chatting about the old 32 Battalion days, the war in Angola, the politics in South Africa, and the greater world, Lafras excused himself saying that he had to catch a flight to Luanda the next morning.

"Lafras tells me you have access to a lot of information about us. How did this come about?" I asked.

"I work for a Midrand company called Strategic Concepts. I'm a sort of partner. It's run by Sean Cleary, formerly of the Department of Foreign Affairs and MI. He left there rather suddenly but he has retained some powerful Foreign Affairs and Military Intelligence connections and now acts as a political advisor to some very high-up people, some influential corporations, and several western governments—and of course, UNITA. We also provide strategic and media planning if necessary."

Johann gave me his business card which showed that he also worked for a company called Omega Support Limited. It had offices in Gibraltar and at Stratcon House in Midrand.

"So why the concern about what we are doing in Angola? Why is Cleary lying to Anglo American about us?"

"You've upset a lot of people," Johann laughed, "not only have you made the SADF look incompetent, you've also created problems for people who have serious business interests with old Jonas [Savimbi]—especially the guys at MI's DST. They've invested millions into Savimbi and UNITA. They're getting the media to crucify you so they can shut you down."

Not realising that he was being filmed, Johann gave me a hoard of information on Cleary, MI, the DFA, and UNITA's concerns. He also told me that Cleary was an advisor to President FW de Klerk, and a paid consultant to both Anglo American and UNITA. Cleary's contacts, according to Johann, reached right into the heart of both the UN and the US government. He also had a very close working relationship with several American politicians who were extremely pro-UNITA, and similar contacts within the British Conservative Party.

Years later General 'Witkop' Badenhorst told me, "General Neels van Tonder of DST used Cleary as an advisor in their dealings with UNITA. We paid him a huge sum of money for his advice."

Cleary, Johann said, was getting as much support as he could from contacts around the world with a view to getting EO closed down and kicked out of Angola. It seemed we were bad for business as far as Angola was concerned. According to him, Cleary also harboured secret ambitions of starting a similar company to EO but needed to first shut EO down. To achieve this, he would, according to Johann, use all and any means possible.

After the conclusion of our first meeting I asked Johann to collect certain information that he claimed to have access to, and established a schedule for future meetings at our offices—I wanted to be able to capture everything he said on video. He immediately accepted my offer of a fee-cum-salary of R20 000 a month provided he gave me what I wanted.

Johann had gushed information, blissfully unaware that two different MI agents had already passed his name to me as someone who was actively working against us. I knew he was briefing journalists regularly and secretly doing everything in his power to discredit EO. It was obvious he was doing the same within MI and the DFA.

Whichever way I looked at it, he couldn't be trusted. He could, however, be used to my advantage, and although we had only had one meeting, I already had sufficient evidence to compromise him if that ever became necessary.

In spite of his other extra-curricular activities, Johann Smith became a valuable source of information about the effects we were having on certain influential people in government and the private sector, and I always kept my guard up to ensure he didn't use me as a conduit for disinformation. What he didn't say was of equal importance to what he did say.

What I found interesting was that the highly duplicitous Cleary regularly passed details from confidential discussions with his clients to the South African president, Peter Gush of Anglo American, and perhaps to other foreign governments as well.

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On 10 February the Secretary-General of the UN Security Council stated that he deplored 'the great loss of life and destruction of property caused by the outbreak of fighting at several locations throughout Angola' and stressed that 'the only way to achieve an effective, verifiable, and sustainable cease-fire' would be for the government and UNITA to conclude and sign a 'comprehensive peace agreement.' He called on the MPLA and UNITA to exercise restraint, honour their commitments, and halt all offensive military actions. He also urged the warring parties to commit themselves to the Lusaka talks. Given that the MPLA was fighting for its very survival, the statement was tantamount to calling on the MPLA to abdicate and surrender to UNITA.

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Information from the various agents who were now actively gathering intelligence for me made it clear that UNITA was starting to prepare itself for a major offensive, and that Executive Outcomes had been placed on its radar as a prime target. The deployment of additional forces to Saurimo had, however, confused UNITA and they were uncertain about what the target for the pending offensive was to be. MI was working hard at trying to determine our intentions, and trying to recruit agents within EO. I allowed two such recruitments, and got the agents[173] to report MI's taskings and intentions back to me.

On 15 February, the Strategic Intelligence Group (SIG) submitted Strategic Intelligence Summary (SIS) 013/094 (compiled from information passed on by Johann Smith and agents within MI) to Nic in Luanda. An extract read:

1. ….
2. Malanje: UNITA force levels are on the increase in this area. Their aim is to gain control of the Luanda-Saurimo logistical supply route and to divide FAA's force levels to prevent them acting against N'dalatando and Huambo. This will allow UNITA to intensify actions against Malanje.
3. Diamond production areas...

Comment: Although UNITA are continually planning these actions, it seems unlikely that they will be able to achieve their goals because of shortages of weapons, ammunition, and fuel. Their priority will be the diamond production areas.

UNITA were concentrating resources within the diamond production areas, and as far as those were concerned, we could expect an aggressive defence from a well- equipped and very determined enemy.

My agents and sources were also reporting a swift escalation in diamond mining activities in the Lunda Norte province which bordered Zaire. Suddenly diamonds were

flowing from the area as though a tap had been opened. This was mirrored by an escalation in munitions and weapons movements from Zaire into the Lunda Norte province. Regular arms shipments from South Africa were also finding their way to UNITA.

Another report from my Strategic Intelligence Group (dated 17 February) read:

> UNITA is putting in a very large effort to strengthen its logistical supply lines in all/and any manner possible. Logistics are currently being channelled through Namibia, South Africa, Zaire, and Zambia.
>
> Major UNITA logistical supply points are currently situated at Ngove, Andulo, Jamba, Lóvua, and Chitembo. Several covert supply lines have recently been opened through Namibia and are mainly being used to supply diesel.

Our signallers also intercepted UN radio traffic indicating that the MPLA and UNITA had both agreed to a revised text relating to issues concerning national reconciliation in Lusaka, and hinting at the possibility of senior UNITA officials being given high-level government positions.

We found it difficult to understand the UN's apparent excitement over this agreement because no cease-fire had been brokered and the war was still raging throughout the country. National reconciliation could only occur after hostilities had ended, and in the meantime both UNITA and the FAA were mustering their forces for major offensive and counter-offensive operations. It appeared that the MPLA had been faced off by UNITA and the UN during the negotiations, but as long as UNITA held the upper hand on the battlefield—and effectively had the UN's support—the MPLA would only be able to negotiate from a position of weakness. This had to be remedied.

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A claim that we were attempting to recruit retrenched members of 451 Parachute Battalion[174] in order to subvert the SADF and threaten South Africa's stability had been reported by SDCI's agent S1 on 15 February. Meanwhile, it was reported in SIS[175] 020/94 that a UK citizen, Charles Brian Nalborough of Ilford, Essex, and two Yugoslav citizens, had been arrested in Rome for selling weapons to UNITA. This illegal arms deal, valued at £53.4 million, was to have been financed with diamonds, and the weapons were to have been shipped to UNITA via Soyo. This information was forwarded to me by an ex-CCB agent who had picked it up from the British media.

On the home front, MI's Directorate of Covert Collection (DCC) and Sub-Division Counter Intelligence (SDCI or OATI in Afrikaans) were hard at work. According to my Military Intelligence agents, a Captain JF Booysen[176] was running some of the SDCI agents in close liaison with Colonel JAB Swart, by then with GS2.[177] Undaunted by the fact that we were not engaged in espionage on behalf of a foreign power or subversive actions designed to undermine the state, they decided to generate whatever 'new

intelligence' they could manufacture. The DFA's UNITA desk, Army Intelligence, and Cleary's Strategic Concepts acted in support of this new endeavour. They probably reasoned that we would never be privy to the lies hidden in their 'Top Secret drawers' but they were unaware that I had a growing army of moles that were burrowing into their treasure troves.

By then I had obtained a video recording of a discussion between a DCC agent handler and an agent under our control. The handler had emphasised that even fabricated intelligence on EO was acceptable—manipulation of the media was to be the order of the day. I showed several radio and television journalists the video but none of them expressed any interest in it. This merely confirmed to me that the SABC was a National Party mouthpiece that would never expose the many skeletons hidden in the Party's closet.

More bizarre things followed. Commander Koos Louw (SA Navy) in charge of the DCC's Angolan desk, invited me for breakfast at the Farm Inn on the outskirts of Pretoria. I had known Koos since my days as an agent handler with the DCC, but he didn't want to talk about old times. He wanted to recruit me as an agent for the DCC in Angola. He made his pitch halfway through breakfast, saying I was perfectly placed to provide a mass of intelligence on Angola.

"But Koos," I asked, "are you saying that despite UN resolutions and the elections in Angola—to say nothing of South Africa's undertaking to honour the results—we are still actively supporting UNITA?"

"You know how politics work," Koos said persuasively. "We need to find out whatever we can about the FAA's strengths, weaknesses, weapons, and so on. We would like details on the training your men are providing and the tactics FAA are likely to use. This information is vital to South Africa; I'm not saying it's going to happen, but we might be called upon to support UNITA again and we must be prepared. You can provide intelligence that will be invaluable to us if we have to go back to war."

"So what you are bluntly saying is that the SADF will probably help to overthrow President dos Santos' government and replace it with UNITA under Jonas Savimbi?"

"I didn't say that," Koos countered. "You certainly implied it."

I told Koos in no uncertain terms that I was not going to betray the Angolan government or my men in Angola. Not only would the future of my company be doomed by such duplicity on my part, such a betrayal would lose EO its newly acquired contract with the Angolan government, and also get my men killed. I had to wonder what game South Africa was playing.

"I think it's time the average South African citizen knew the truth concerning Angola and the 'communist tide,'" I said.

Commander (later Rear Admiral) Koos Louw from DCC tried to recruit the author to spy on the FAA (photo: Die Burger)

Koos changed tactics and tried to play on my supposed loyalty and my past as a 32 Battalion soldier, DCC agent handler, and CCB operative. He said I was well aware of how important agents were and suggested that I should assist him as a patriot. He also implied that he could make my life easier if I cooperated.

I regarded this as a blatant threat, and told him I thought it would be better for both of us if we ended the meeting and never spoke again.

"Another thing, Koos," I said as I stood to leave, "I do know the value of agents—especially well-placed ones."

I dropped this hint about the agents I was already running within MI hoping it might lead to an internal witch-hunt and relieve some of the pressure on us. I don't know if Koos took the bait but my agents were never under any threat of being identified or compromised.

I liked Koos but I was under no illusion about whether or not he would tell his masters what my attitude was. I also warned Nico Palm and Lafras that we could expect some sort of retaliation. I wasn't wrong.

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On 18 February the ANC (despite having rejected the ruling National Party's black homelands policy) met President Lucas Mangope and his government to discuss the coming national elections as well as the future of the homeland. That same day the Bophuthatswana Police raided the ANC's offices in Mafikeng in an attempt to pacify Bophuthatswana citizens who didn't like the fact that their president was meeting the ANC.

The ANC was also suspicious about Bophuthatswana's airport having been used to spirit funds out of South Africa, and they discussed this with Mangope and his government. As a result, an investigation was launched and the airport was temporarily shut down. This led to a running joke about 18 February having been the day on which

Armscor stopped being able to use Bophuthatswana's airfields to resupply UNITA. Much to our disappointment, the airport was re-opened a month later.

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Shortly afterwards, a 'secret' list, written in Afrikaans and containing 'essential elements of information on Executive Outcomes' was obtained and handed to me by one of my agents. This four-page document (directly translated) contained the following:

Serial	Activity	Actions	Responsible bodies	Remarks
1.	RSA Recruitment of persons in RSA for military and non-military activities outside of the country	Get information on EO planning for deployments of recruited personnel	DFA, NI, SADF, SAPS, Home Affairs	Informati needed as evidence connectio with merc classificat
		Prepare legislation for countering recruitment for use in role as mercenaries		AG RSA already re to prosecu
2.	Procurement of equipment such as webbing, radios, rations, maps, mine- detection equipment	Determine if sales regulations are being followed	Department of Customs and Excise	
4.	Payment of members in Foreign currency and in local or foreign bank accounts	Confirm that exchange control and receiver of revenue regulations are adhered to	Receiver of Revenue, Reserve Bank	
8.	ANGOLA Training of FAA soldiers	Get information with regard to these activities which can act as a foundation	NI, SADF, DFA	

for possible action
against EO, e.g.
own legislation,
classification as
mercenary, pressure
on host country

A 'secret' MI list translated from Afrikaans containing so-called 'essential elements of informatic
Executive Outcomes'

I was mildly horrified by the fact that someone had scrawled, 'Let's fuck them up! UNITA must win!' in the margin of the document. It was a repugnant indication of the mentality we were dealing with. This list revealed the level of concern rippling through the pro-UNITA groups entrenched in the South African government and armed forces. Most of the information requested was freely available, yet it had to be 'collected secretly' using inflated budgets in an attempt to establish us as criminals. It also made an absolute mockery of the intelligence community's denials that it was gathering intelligence on us; we were clearly very important to them. I noted that the SAP, the DFA and the NIS, the Department of Home Affairs, the Reserve Bank, and the Receiver of Revenue had been tasked to investigate us and provide information. This formidable array of officialdom would not be put off—even if the lies were exposed.

Agent reports that found their way to my desk made it clear that EO was being portrayed as a 'prime threat', not only to South Africa but also to Africa's stability. Among other illegal activities, we were accused of smuggling diamonds and weapons into South Africa and committing atrocities against Angola's civilian population. Some documents implied that our modus operandi was to move into countries, systematically take them over, and ruthlessly exploit their mineral resources for financial gain. It was even hinted that EO might become the advance guard for a new kind of colonisation.

EO was also, allegedly, recruiting virtually the entire SADF and gathering intelligence on all its personnel. SDCI claimed that we were being funded and supported by MI6, not the client governments we were working for. They even maintained that we were being jointly controlled by the CIA and British Intelligence— and actively engaged in some sort of operation to undermine the SADF and upset South Africa's national security.

Another report stated that we were stealing SADF equipment (night-vision equipment, specialist diving equipment, parachutes, ration packs, and even water bottles). These reports were fed to the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC) or passed on to the SAP for further investigation and action against the company.

At NICOC, a decision—based entirely on the lies generated by MI—was taken on how to act against us. The SAP in turn, was flooded with disinformation and spent many hundreds of thousands of Rands—as well as manhours—following up false intelligence and trying to find evidence against us.

Even more preposterous were the reports that claimed we owned our own banks and financial institutions—presumably financed by our diamond-smuggling activities. One of these stated:

The diamond facility in London is still receiving and cutting a large number of Executive Outcomes' diamonds and then selling them on to the outside markets. This huge flow of diamonds into the UK is being done with an Ibis Air Lear jet. Tony Buckingham is the Director Operations.

Lafras summed up our feelings by saying it was obvious the DFA, MI and their cronies were going to fight us to the bitter end using any and all means available. Creating false intelligence reports was merely part of their modus operandi.

I agreed but also viewed the mass of 'secret lies' as a blatant attempt to implicate EO in criminal activities that spanned Africa and the UK.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again," I answered, "if they so desperately want to fight us we'll give them a war. There's no way we can sit idly by while these bastards feed UNITA information that will get our guys shot. Anyway, the media have already implied we are criminals and branded us as mercenaries; what more can they do?"

It was clear that the lies being fed to the media were intended to obscure the real reason why we had become such a threat: that we might possibly uncover the DFA and MI's role in destabilising actions across southern Africa or expose the illegal activities some of our politicians and high-brow businessmen were engaged in: smuggling diamonds, ivory, arms, and precious wood.

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Unaware of the developing situation in South Africa, our men were hard at work training 16 Brigade and finalising the plans for the FAA's offensive against the diamond fields. They knew it would only be a matter of time before their recruits were committed to battle, and by then they had to be a cohesive and aggressive fighting unit. The manner in which these young Angolan troops acquitted themselves on the field of battle would also be a direct reflection of the success—or failure—of our training efforts.

The EO men going to Saurimo would form the nucleus of our RDF for joint operations with the FAA. The days before were spent working out the detailed plan for the move (flight scheduling, logistics, signals, casevac procedures, timings, and radio frequencies).

Oom Hennie and his men were again summoned from Longa to Cabo Ledo to provide further input on the planning of the deployments to Saurimo and Malanje. There were two primary aspects to the initial phases of the plan to recapture Cafunfu. This would, within a short space of time change but it was initially decided that:

- An airlift would fly the headquarters group, infantry fighting vehicles (BMP- 2s), a group of EO men, newly trained elements of the 16-Brigade, and other immediate combat and administrative requirements in to Saurimo. Once all forces were ready to commence the campaign, the force in Saurimo would advance to Malanje.
- An FAA mechanised infantry battle group would deploy from Dondo[178] and advance across country from Dangeia-menha to Malanje, wiping out any UNITA resistance

encountered en route.
• The forces would link up at Malanje and then continue the advance on Cafunfu.

UNITA would not allow a move along two fronts (Dondo and Saurimo) to Malanje and onwards to Cafunfu without interference—in fact it was assumed by all that they would try to prevent it at all costs. It was also clear to us that any move along the routes would be problematic unless it was covered by close air support. But, a two- pronged advance on Malanje would force UNITA to divide their forces, and deploy over a wide front essentially weakening their hold over the interior.

One of my major concerns was that the American CIA had long before provided UNITA with deadly Stinger surface-to-air missiles. If used against our pilots, they would effectively neutralise our close air support and leave our men without extraction, search and rescue, and casevac capabilities.

Phase 1 of the approved campaign strategy commenced on 22 February 1984 when the EO force that would later become a combat team of 16 Brigade were airlifted to Saurimo. Initially referred to as a 'Rapid Deployment Force',[179] this combat team would eventually become known as Combat Team A (Alpha).

At 09:00 that day I received a message confirming that the vertical deployment of the HQ group was under way. In my opinion, this phase of the operation was highly vulnerable considering UNITA's surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft artillery systems. I would spend several nerve-racking and tense hours hoping to hear that it had gone better than expected.

The first lift, in a huge Russian Il-76 aircraft, carried Duncan Rykaard, Carl Dietz, a small headquarters group, a signals element, a protection team, and two Russian BMP[180] infantry fighting vehicles. After learning with trepidation that Angolan drivers had been detailed to load the vehicles into the aircraft, Colonel Roelf van Heerden (who had been reassigned from Rio Longa to take command of our mechanised combat team-cum-rapid deployment force) watched nervously as two failed attempts caused damage to two of the Il-76s, and then got his own men to take over. Each lift took two BMPs along with their crews, ammunition, support elements, and maintenance equipment.

To bolster the BPM's 30mm cannon's capabilities, our men had mounted an AGS-17 grenade launcher to the BMP's turrets. This made the BMP a formidable fire support base when it was required to act as such. The firing ports also allowed men to deliver small-arms fire from within the vehicle while remaining protected.

Once at Saurimo, Duncan, Carl, and their men immediately started setting up a communications centre, an operations room, a field hospital, a kitchen, and storerooms in anticipation of the arrival of the rest of the men. Sleeping quarters were also assigned.

The first BMPs offloaded were immediately deployed to strategic points around the perimeter of the airfield to secure the area and discourage any UNITA interference while the Il-76s flew back and forth between Luanda and Saurimo, loading and disgorging men and cargo. These battle ready BMPs were crewed by EO men.

That afternoon, the first elements of our air wing departed for Saurimo with three Mi-17s that had now been allocated to our helicopter pilots together with a single Pilatus PC-7. Laden with extra ferry tanks to provide fuel for the long flight, the helicopters also carried ammunition, weapons, bombs, and rations for the men who had been trooped in to Saurimo.

The flight was not as uneventful as the crews had hoped; they were forced to navigate their heavily-laden helicopters past several tropical thunderstorms. One Mi-17 was forced to make a fuel-eating detour and barely made it to Saurimo. The PC-7 that had kept a watchful eye over the Mi-17s returned to Luanda.

Except for the few men and bits of equipment that were scheduled to follow the next morning, the complete EO combat team had arrived in Saurimo by late afternoon. The Angolans were astounded by the speed of our move: an almost complete and fully equipped combat team had been airlifted several hundred kilometres in seven hours. We could only imagine UNITA's surprise to find that within a day, Saurimo's vulnerable defences had been strengthened by a complete battle-ready combat team. Kallie Coetzee was there with his cameras to film the airlift so the FAA generals could see how Phase 1 of the plan had unfolded.

Chartered Il-76 at Luanda airport preparing to airlift EO forces to Saurimo (photo: J Dempers)

That evening, Saurimo established communications with our various headquarters at Cabo Ledo, Luanda, Rio Longa, and Pretoria, and using its allocated radio call-sign (Golf Four), notified us that the heavy airlift had progressed well and according to plan.

Roelf van Heerden was briefed by Duncan and Carl and he began to issue orders to the commanders of the combat team-cum-rapid deployment force. There was much work to be done preparing the ops room which required maps of differing scales, flowcharts to plot progress and monitor time and distance, appreciations, graphs indicating personnel, rations, ammunition scales, and map overlays. Their own on-the-ground intelligence capability was rapidly established by making contact with the locals in the area, and incoming information was checked, verified, and plotted on the maps. Area operations around Saurimo would soon lead to the capture of some UNITA troops.

The communications centre (Comcen) was equipped with state-of-the-art HF frequency-hopping base stations and high-speed data encryption systems. Our signallers had soon tuned in to UNITA's radio nets and quickly broken their codes which allowed us to monitor their every move and gauge their intentions. Signals intelligence (SIGINT) became a valuable source of intelligence for our planners.

Direction-finding (DF) equipment was deployed and the positions of UNITA's base stations and mobile communication systems were located, plotted on maps, and identified as possible targets for neutralisation. Using intelligence gained from SIGINT and interrogation reports from captured UNITA prisoners and deserters, Carl continually updated his picture of UNITA in the Saurimo area. We also learnt from these sources and my agents that UNITA, much to their frustration, were unable to monitor or read our radio traffic.

The EO force was sub-divided into four groups and by then comprised:

- Force commander: Duncan Rykaard
- Alpha group: commanded by Braam de Beer with about 30 men.
- Bravo group: commanded by Billy Erasmus with about 30 men.
- Charlie group: commanded by Jan Joubert with about 30 men.
- Delta group: initially under the command of Duncan Rykaard with about 21 men.
- Reconnaissance group: commanded by Meno Uys with three by three-man teams.

In Pretoria, my agents were tasked to redirect and focus their collection efforts on the Saurimo area, and especially the approach routes to Cafunfu in the Lunda Norte province, one of the main diamond mining areas under UNITA control, and a very strategic target.

The FAA commanders at Saurimo were highly impressed with the EO Comcen and the manner in which our radio traffic was being driven. They soon asked to piggy-back on our communications nets instead of using their own, which were continuously monitored by UNITA. With permission granted, they were soon able to hide their radio traffic in the ether, frustrating UNITA who till then had been eavesdropping. UNITA had now gone signalsblind.

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Liaison between our men and the FAA forces at Saurimo soon developed into a headache we hadn't anticipated. The FAA used the slow and cumbersome Soviet- style command and control system in which they had been trained. This meant that no one person was responsible for anything, as a result of which, accountability and responsibility were sorely lacking. FAA officers had to refer back to more senior officers who, in turn, referred back to Luanda before any request could be granted. This became a nightmare, particularly for our aircrews and their support teams, who couldn't even refuel without getting permission from Luanda. This cumbersome command-style required urgent intervention and rectification.

Liaison was handled through the base commander, General Sukissa, a hereditary prince of the Lunda Chokwe tribe who tried to be as helpful as his position would allow, but this was by no means good enough. It soon became evident that this issue would impact very negatively on future operations and create unnecessary problems (possibly even motivate men to leave the company out of frustration). Such an outcome would give the cynical press a great scoop, boost UNITA's confidence, and negatively affect the 16 Brigade's troops and combat capability even before the offensive started. It would also, at this point, be very difficult to find replacements.

To make matters worse, all operational matters were controlled by General Mendez, a 'mulatto',[181] who was openly hostile towards our men and I was worried that this might lead to a drop in morale. Neither were Duncan, Roelf, and Carl the kind of men who accepted antagonism meekly.

I discussed these issues with Lafras, who flew to Luanda to take issue with General Faćeira about the Saurimo problems. Not known for his diplomacy, Lafras didn't mince words and demanded that the situation be rectified. The general gave an undertaking to this effect and later repeated it to Nic van den Bergh.

Nic also had some personal frustrations to discuss with us, not only regarding FAA but also Executive Outcomes. Because of his position, he didn't feel he was at liberty to discuss certain matters frankly with Oom Hennie, Duncan, and the other officers, and this invariably led to friction. The Angolan General Staff also sometimes also overruled Nic's plans, increasing his frustration.

Nic had to learn that things could not always be as he wanted them to be. General Mendez, the fly in the ointment, was quickly replaced, first by General Marques and then by General McKenzie, an ex-UNITA general who had switched sides after the 1992 election. Brigadier Pepe de Castro was appointed the commander of 16 Brigade's planned tactical advance from Saurimo to Malanje and onwards to Cafunfu. There was a lot of politicking within the FAA's higher echelon but things seemed slowly to improve for our men, especially as Brigadier Pepe was known to those who had participated in our much heralded 'invasion' of Soyo. He in turn had a healthy respect for EO and that made things easier for us.

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After many frustrations (resulting mainly from unkept FAA commitments) the helicopter pilots decided they could no longer wait for the promised Mi-24 helicopter gunships and instead commandeered the help of their ground crews in arming their Mi-17s with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on. They also armoured the cockpits as best they could to afford some protection from ground fire.

"We didn't want to be flying around with bullets up our arses," one pilot explained.

The big helicopters became dual-purpose machines—they could deliver men to a predetermined landing zone and then act as orbiting gunships to provide suppressing fire or fire support.

The Soviet AGS-17 30mm multiple-grenade launcher was considered for use as an air-to-ground weapon. Correctly deployed, it was a devastating area weapon, but its uncontrollable recoil made it too dangerous to mount in a helicopter—there was a real possibility that a pilot might end up shooting himself out of the sky.

Next, using an ingenious system of wiring and imaginative improvisation, the men mounted 23mm gun pods on the helicopter pylons, but their lack of technical data and their own unfamiliarity with the weapon meant they were only able to use it as a single shot weapon. This wasn't acceptable as they needed the capacity to saturate a target with automatic direct fire.

Lacking adequate air support, the men tried to convert the Mi-17 into a bomber. Here a 250kg bomb is being taken to the Mi-17. The idea was eventually discarded

They then tried to convert the helicopters into bombers by mounting 250kg bombs on the airframe pylons. The bombs had to be dropped from the hover at about 3 000 metres. While this guaranteed deadly accuracy, it left them vulnerable to UNITA anti-aircraft fire or missiles so that idea was also scrapped.

They eventually realised with considerable disappointment that they would be unable to support the men on the ground in the way they had hoped. Eventually they turned their attentions to the PKM machine gun which was robust and reliable and the best practical weapon available. Other than that, they would have to rely on their flying skills, which were certainly not in short supply.

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In continually assessing and reassessing the changing operational situation, Duncan and Carl discovered that UNITA had occupied an area near the bridge over the Tchicapo River, which put them only about five kilometres from Saurimo. It also put them within range for a standoff mortar bombardment or a night infiltration attack. It was deemed wise to push them back to a more acceptable distance. Duncan launched a show of force operation and without too much of a fight, UNITA withdrew from the area.

Once that had been achieved, Duncan intended to drive them out of Saurimo's area of responsibility and influence entirely. He ordered preparations for a pre- emptive strike against UNITA's local positions and the men started camouflaging equipment, zeroing weapons, conducting rehearsals and small-team training, and practising emergency procedures.

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While the media was caught up in its assault on Executive Outcomes, the South African government continued selling arms and munitions into the ever-worsening situation in Rwanda and Burundi. These activities, along with Armscor's supply lines to UNITA, were largely ignored by the press, but neither the press and their 'confidential sources', nor the UN, was ignoring us.

Whether intentionally or through incompetence, the UN had—consistently and dismally—failed in Africa, and so had the so-called Western Powers. One only had to look at the way they bumbled around in Angola to know it. None of them were really interested in Africa's problems. Nor did any of them really want an end to the civil war; strife meant more outside control over Angola's natural resources. It also meant that a lot of money could be made on the sales of weapons and other military equipment, both to UNITA and to the government of Zaire. The currency of natural resources was abundant. The number of cargo aircraft flying between South Africa and Zaire was sufficient proof of this.[182] Several NGOs, equally keen to capitalise on the situation, flooded into Angola.

Nico Palm started getting calls from ex-Armscor associates who told him they were intending to make sure he would be locked up for a long time. Nico tried to remain calm, but the mind games did affect him.

Johann Smith and I met regularly and he told me Cleary was more desperate than ever to get us out of Angola. He also said that Cleary was advising Savimbi on a proposed propaganda plan, so we could expect an intensification of negative media coverage. I noticed that Johann's reports always multiplied towards month's end; obviously he needed our money to fund his lifestyle.

"Bring me proof of Cleary's duplicity so I can do something about it," I told him.

He said it would be easy to remove documents from Cleary's office, photocopy them, and replace them. And he did.

Other agents in MI told me that the aim was to create the perception that Executive Outcomes alone were responsible for the problems in Africa. They also warned me that the disinformation campaign against us was about to escalate.

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Nic van den Berg, meanwhile, reassigned Oom Hennie Blaauw to Dondo where the FAA's 45 Brigade was deploying its T-62 tanks in anticipation of a road- clearing operation for the push through to Malanje. Brigadier Sachimo (second-in-command of 16 Brigade) and Brigadier Mandinu (45 Brigade) briefed Oom Hennie on their proposed

operational designs. Essentially, 45 Brigade would secure the route, establish a bridgehead across the Lucala River, and protect 16 Brigade when its leading battle group crossed the bridge at the start of its push for Malanje. 16 Brigade would occupy an area across the river and commence final preparations for the advance on Malanje. 45 Brigade would then withdraw to Dondo.

Oom Hennie became highly involved in making a detailed appreciation and plan for this operation. The considerations included preparation of combat elements to conduct defile drills, counter-ambush drills, joint infantry and armour operations, laager drills, defensive actions, attacks, and the consolidation and exploitation phases. The concept of lightning-fast mechanised infantry battles was new to the FAA and it had to be carefully explained and rehearsed.

The terrain that 16 Brigade would be moving through was not well suited to mechanised infantry operations but ideal for the kind of attacks that UNITA had been trained for—small-unit ambushes, infiltration night attacks, and anti-armour ambushes—and they had enjoyed considerable success in the past. Ensuring a successful advance would require much planning, and anticipation of possible enemy ambush and defensive positions.

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"They are planning to take you out," an MI agent warned me on 9 March. "Take out as in kill?" I asked.

"Yes, they want you out of Angola as soon as possible; you're screwing things up for them—apparently something to do with the government's long-term foreign policy. MI knows you have moved a so-called EO combat team to Saurimo and see that as a significant threat to the Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul provinces[183] and to the UNITA deployments at Cafunfu and Jamba in particular."

"Any ideas on how they might go about it?"

"Something was said about a car bomb but I have no idea when or where."

I took note of the warning but didn't really think they would risk using a car bomb. I realised, though, that I was vulnerable and had no way of defending myself against a planned and orchestrated bomb attack. I could only hope they would despatch a man with a gun. I would at least be able to handle that.

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On 11 March Colonel Mike Herbst and several other EO armour officers and instructors arrived at the brigade HQ at Dondo from Rio Longa with the final remnants of 16 Brigade. Mike, who was a great friend of Hennie Blaauw's, was a tall man with a ready twinkle in his eye. Apart from being a very competent tank officer, he was a nuclear physicist by profession and one of only a handful of scientists who had worked for the South African government during its development of a nuclear bomb at Advena (a subsidiary of Armscor's Kentron company) under a blanket of secrecy. The facility had been created to

put ‘distance’ between Kentron and the nuclear development programme. Had the media known about Mike’s background and realised where he was, we would probably have been accused of building nuclear weapons for the Angolans. Mike and his team were however there to train the FAA tank crews in gunnery.
14 Brigade was almost ready to make its appearance on the battlefield. Under the watchful eyes of Mike and his instructors, the gunners did final rehearsals to improve hit efficiency and practiced until they finally pronounced themselves satisfied.

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Our strike pilots arrived at Saurimo from Luanda with their two self-modified Pilatus PC-7 ground-attack aircraft. A few hours later they were given their first mission orders amidst feelings of excitement and apprehension. Their target was a UNITA command post that had been identified at Muhango,[184] a few kilometres south of Xingi. With maps spread out before them and notebooks ready, Pine Pienaar and Louwrens Bosch listened intently as Duncan Rykaard and Carl Dietz briefed them. After that the pilots conducted their own mission planning and checked their aircraft to ensure they were refuelled and bombed-up. The pilots were excited about the mission. Carl later told me how infectious their overall enthusiasm had been.

Everybody watched as the late afternoon calm was shattered by the roar of turboprop aircraft engines echoing through the base as Pine and Louwrens thundered down the runway and lifted into the sky, bound for their first target.

They hit the UNITA command post at Muhango with a very accurate strike at last light, firing rockets into several buildings. Caught by surprise, the enemy was unable to deliver any anti-aircraft fire and the two aircraft continued to circle and wreak havoc on the ground. Finding no further targets of opportunity warranting attention, they turned and headed back for Saurimo using the main road (Xingi, Cacolo, and Mono Quinbundu) as a navigational guide.

On the way back, Pine, flying lead, spotted an enemy troop concentration near Cacolo and blasted them with his remaining rockets. By the time Louwrens got overhead, the survivors had recovered from their initial shock and they returned fire, hitting his aircraft’s wing.

EO-piloted PC-7s en route to conduct a strike on UNITA targets

In the ops room at Saurimo shouts of jubilation turned to dismay when they heard Louwrens calmly report to Pine that he had taken a serious hit. The emergency search and rescue (S&R) plan was immediately activated in case Louwrens had to ditch his Pilatus aircraft. The S&R team raced to the helicopters and prepared to take off.

Then to everyone's relief they spotted the damaged aircraft limping in at barely tree-top level. Louwrens carefully nursed it in, fully aware that a trail of Jet A1 fuel and smoke was streaming behind his plane. He later recounted his ordeal to me:

I saw Pine's rockets whacking the UNITA concentration but by the time I got overhead they had recovered and were firing blindly into the air. It was almost surreal to see the green tracers flashing by. Silently I was hoping they'd miss me but with all the lead flying skywards, I knew in an instant that the chances of a stray bullet hitting the plane were pretty good. I suddenly felt the plane shudder and knew I had taken a hit but I had no idea where. I told Pine and he asked if I was okay and whether I thought I could make it back to base on my own. I replied in the affirmative, realising that if I ditched the plane there was no telling when General Neto (Chief of the Angolan Air Force) would give us another one. Besides, I wasn't about to get shot down on my first mission. Basically I had no option but to bring the plane home.

As soon as his damaged plane touched down on the airfield, Louwrens taxied to his parking bay and clambered from the cockpit with a face-splitting grin, intent on having his aircraft promptly repaired so he could go back and punish those who had shot at him. Duncan wouldn't even consider it—one scare was enough for the day.

That night, the pilots and their ground crews, having drawn first blood, celebrated their first mission success in typical air force fashion with full support from the others on the base. Beer flowed like a river in flood.

Three hours later I received confirmation that the strike had been successful.

Radio intercepts confirmed that the devastating air raid had taken the command post at Muhango by complete surprise. They had suffered at least twenty casualties and UNITA wasn't happy. The notes that signals officer Piet Crouwcamp had scribbled as he transcribed the intercept were later passed to me.

Translated from Portuguese, the UNITA radio operator's message read as follows:

Tx (from): Balanca. Rx (to): Baluarte
It's impossible for me to contact the lieutenant from my position because he is wounded and the doctor is busy treating him. There are many casualties here from the jet fighters.

It was interesting to us that UNITA referred to the propeller-driven PC-7s as 'jet fighters'—perhaps they had heard that a group of ex-SAAF Mirage and Impala pilots were flying for us.

I flew into Dondo on 10 March and addressed the men before the push to Malanje began. I told them how proud I was of them and thanked them for the work they had done for the FAA so far. I also told them to look after themselves as they would certainly be coming under fire from a determined UNITA, which would do everything in its power to halt their advance. I wanted no unnecessary casualties and was confident that, in Oom Hennie's hands, they would be well looked after. It was obvious that their morale was extremely high.

Soon thereafter, 16 Brigade (minus the elements already at Saurimo) began deploying to, and assembling at, the planned brigade assembly area with a force that became known as Battle Group B (Bravo). On 14 March the Angolan High Command visited the brigade assembly area at Dange-iamenha to observe the readiness status of 16 Brigade elements and to review the final plans for their advance on Malanje.

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Despite the chaos being created by UNITA and the FAA's counter-actions, not to mention the human catastrophe that was unfolding, the UN remained happy to continue trying to talk away the problems. On 16 March the UN Security Council adopted resolution 903/1994, which extended UNAVEM II's mandate until 31 May, but imposed no additional sanctions against UNITA, giving them sufficient breathing space to continue their weapons and equipment build-up and to press-gang recruits into their army. After the Secretary-General reported that the parties had come to an agreement in Lusaka, it declared its readiness, in principle, to consider authorising UNAVEM II to increase its manpower and also ordered the Secretary-General to proceed with contingency planning. As I had already noted that the UN had no real interest in resolving the war, I surmised that the 'contingency planning' included the deployment of additional forces and a massive increase in budget.

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That same night Duncan inserted two small reconnaissance teams into the Cuango area (around Cafunfu). They had been selected by Meno Uys (also an ex- Special Forces operator). Duncan later told me:

I instructed Meno to select the teams and go ahead with the deployment planning. Their mission instructions were clear; they were to conduct the initial ground reconnaissance phase of the plan to capture Cafunfu. Meno also confirmed their escape and evasion plans. Renier van der Merwe and Simon Witherspoon were selected as team leaders and Meno personally supervised their kit, plans, and so on. I also attended their final briefings. Renier's team consisted of himself, Steyn Marais, and Handsome Ndhlovu. Simon's small team comprised himself and Rich Nichol.

After the teams had been inserted by helicopter the tension became almost unbearable. They were deployed more than 300 kilometres from Saurimo and no ready air support would be available to them if they came under fire—they would have to rely solely on their abilities and skills as reconnaissance teams.

Theirs was no easy task. Once they were deep inside enemy territory, every local was likely to report their presence to UNITA, even if only to avoid retribution. If they got into trouble, their fate would lie in the hands of the search and rescue teams who would be scrambled from Saurimo.

On 19 March I visited Generals De Matos and Itha in Luanda to pay my respects and give them feedback on the situation on the ground as I saw it. I also discussed the lack of critical equipment we were still experiencing. They expressed satisfaction with what the men were doing and confidence that the offensive would succeed; they were very keen for the operation to get under way. They undertook to look into the equipment shortages.

General Itha thereafter spoke to me privately in his office and asked about the situation regarding EO in South Africa. I described the most recent reports and he expressed concern, but thought they were merely the result of politicians playing deceptive games. I also advised him of the increase in the disinformation campaign against EO and the allegations that we were engaged in organised crime.

I was concerned that the press campaign would place his government under more international pressure.

"It seems clear the South African government wants you out of here," he said.

"I am well aware of that, General. But frankly, I couldn't give a shit about what they do or don't want. It is crystal clear that someone is desperately trying to wrap up this war in favour of UNITA before we have a change of government back home. I find it strange that they say nothing about those who are supporting UNITA from South Africa; they are more concerned about us supporting the MPLA."

"Why do you think?" he asked.

"Maybe Angola's curse is its wealth of natural resources. People want to control them."

"But what rubbish they write. Even the Belgian press is reporting negatively on you," he said.

"Well, perhaps the Belgians also have their own agenda. After all, barely a century ago they murdered millions of your northern neighbours so that they could claim the rubber and copper in the Congo for themselves. Even worse, they weren't invited— they just came and slaughtered whoever stood in their path. For them to cry foul now is a severe case of the pot calling the kettle black.

"Besides, we all know that there are UNITA elements operating out of Zaire.[185] What's more, Antwerp is the diamond cutting centre of the world. If you win the war, it will hurt their business. It will certainly be less profitable for them to purchase their diamonds through Endiama."[186]

The general then asked if I would consider sharing our intelligence with him. I told him the strategic intelligence reports were already being forwarded to Nic for dissemination and that my commanders where already sharing whatever was applicable with their Angolan counterparts. Itha nevertheless asked me to visit him and discuss intelligence matters whenever I was in Luanda.

"Be careful General," he warned me as we shook hands and parted.

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It was around this time that I discussed, with General De Matos, the idea of saving the giant sable (the large antelope that appears on the Angolan airline's[187] logo) which was close to extinction having been virtually shot out by the warring parties and poachers during the conflict. Although it was probably the last thing on his mind, the general gave me permission to investigate ways of saving this magnificent animal and Project Kissama[188] was born. Nic van den Bergh played a major role in bringing various parties together to ensure a sustainable approach to saving Angolan wild life of all sorts. Professor Wouter van den Hooven from the University of Pretoria also got involved, only to have MI, in several of their later reports, falsely claim that the professor was an 'EO agent'.

The project ultimately became known as the Kissama Foundation, with President dos Santos as its patron and former South African National Party politician Roelf Meyer (chief National Party negotiator at CODESA) eventually becoming one of its trustees.[189] Once the project seemed to be gaining traction, Nic van den Bergh excused himself—he had more important things to do. Nico Palm and I spoke to several specialists at the Pretoria and Johannesburg zoos and phoned various game parks around South Africa hoping to attract interest in the sable project.

We had one notable response—a man who identified himself as Johan Dames and said he belonged to the World Wildlife Fund. Dames said he could help us sell giant sable trophies if we arranged for hunters to get into the area where they were known to be. He claimed to be a close friend of Pik Botha's[190] and said that Botha would use his considerable influence with Dr Savimbi and UNITA to assist us in locating animals in UNITA-held territory so they could be hunted down and shot. Unbeknown to Dames, the entire conversation was being recorded.

I told Dames that our plan was to save the surviving giant sable, not shoot them. I also mentioned that any poachers we found in the area would suffer the same fate as he envisaged for the giant sable—Botha included. Dames immediately terminated his phone call.

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'n Medewerker rapporteer dat Prof. Wouter van den Hooven van Tukkies in diens van EO en deur hulle betaal word, werk aan 'n wildtuin projek buite Luanda waar spesifiek ook Africa Gorillas hervestig word. Prof. Wouter van den Hooven het op 25 Julie '95 terug gekeer en is tans in die RSA.

Extract from a 'secret' MI report (TB/0030/95) claiming Professor Wouter van der Hooven was an 'EO agent'

The EO teams at Dange-ia-Menha and Dondo became concerned that UNITA might launch concentrated attacks against FAA's positions there. As 16 Brigade's battle groups there had not yet been blooded in action, there was a concern that they might not be able to withstand concentrated UNITA attacks. They knew UNITA would probably favour company-strength night assaults against the defensive perimeters, or otherwise opt for small-team penetration attacks—also at night. This concern had to be addressed immediately.

Oom Hennie was also concerned that if UNITA managed a successful night attack it would dent the morale of the newly trained 16 Brigade which could, in turn, negatively impact on the advance on Malanje. It would also bring our training into question and we couldn't allow that to happen.

At Oom Hennie's insistence and after many FAA attempts to obstruct him, his EO team was given permission to assist 16 Brigade elements with clearing fields of fire, all-round defence planning, positioning of fire bases, determining defensive fire tasks, and definition of perimeters which otherwise would have rendered them vulnerable to UNITA actions.

There were several false alarms which resulted in massive barrages of undisciplined outgoing fire being flung at imaginary UNITA assault groups from the brigade's perimeter as the young FAA troops used every weapon they could lay their hands on.

At around 04:00 one morning a UNITA penetration team managed to breach 16 Brigade's perimeter. Lafras reported it thus: UNITA launched their pre-dawn penetration-attack against Oom Hennie and his men at approximately 04:00. It was apparent that UNITA were by now being ordered to attack us—my opinion was that their orders were coming from South Africa. Apparently there was quite a heavy volume of fire coming in to the base, but I'm guessing UNITA never bargained on such a massive volume of fire being returned. According to Hennie, FAA responded with virtually everything they had at their disposal. This included tanks, vehicle-mounted 23mms, mortars, and small arms. The FAA fired at ghosts for 10 to 15 minutes and then it was quiet again. It seemed like UNITA had been expecting to take the base by surprise but I think UNITA had been surprised to find that FAA was now firing back at them instead of running.

At first light, Hennie Blaauw and his men, along with some FAA troops, did a damage assessment and found three UNITA bodies within the perimeter. UNITA had been armed

with the new-generation US-made M 72 Light Anti-tank Weapon or LAW—obviously they had wanted to take out some of FAA's armoured vehicles. In their haste to get out of the perimeter, they had left several AK-47s, PKMs, a lot of ammunition, and a heap of South African manufactured white phosphorous grenades. Several blood trails indicated that a number of UNITA troops had been wounded.

Two wounded UNITA troops were captured in the follow-up operation and taken back to the base for interrogation. After our medics had patched them up the prisoners told the interrogation team that they had been part of a platoon-plus penetration team. The remainder of their force had stayed outside the perimeter in order to support them if need be. Obviously they hadn't given too much support. Another UNITA soldier was captured a bit later on. According to him, UNITA had made a gross miscalculation error, believing that Dange-ia-Menha's defences had weakened when 45 Brigade was re-deployed to the Lucala River. Apparently they shat themselves when FAA retaliated. They hadn't realised that FAA was capable of such a volume of accurate return fire and they were forced to call off the attack and run like hell.

The prisoner apparently also told Oom Hennie that several of their wounded had died when they withdrew in a rather disorganised manner.

I took note of the new-generation US-manufactured M 72 LAWs and the South African white phosphorous grenades that UNITA had at their disposal. Someone was supplying them with new equipment and weapons; the lot numbers on the grenades indicated that they had been manufactured in 1993.

Of course, South Africa was still maintaining that its motives were as pure as the driven snow and that none of its weapons or munitions were being sold to UNITA. Remembering that UNITA had used new lot-numbered South African grenades during their attacks on my men at Soyo in early 1993, I didn't believe the denials.

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Much to everyone's annoyance, the plan for the advance on Malanje was suddenly changed by Brigadier Sachimo. After crossing the Kwanza River, 16 Brigade would now detour to the east, avoid the main Luanda-Malanje road and instead, follow a secondary road approximately 50 kilometres further south, thus minimising the likelihood of UNITA raids on the logistics column.

The deviation meant that Oom Hennie, Mike Herbst, Sachimo and their planners would once again have to make a new appreciation and plan. It delayed the advance to Malanje, but Oom Hennie later admitted that the change had allowed 16 Brigade to exercise a safer option and given them more flexibility.

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Meanwhile, Simon Witherspoon's reconnaissance team, deployed in the Cuango area near Cafunfu, was having its own share of very serious problems. It had been compromised by pro-UNITA locals in the area—always a danger to a reconnaissance team

and something that had been taken into consideration by all concerned during the planning of the operation.

Simon and Rich Nichol, severely compromised and on the run, called for a hot-extraction late on the night of 21 March. Duncan and Carl immediately implemented the S&R procedures and a few minutes later, the two Mi-17s lifted off with JC Linde and Juba Joubert piloting one and Charlie Tait and Sonny Janeke the other. The helicopters, each carrying an eight-man assault and protection team, were accompanied by a single PC-7 aircraft to act as the Telstar, in effect an air-to-ground coordination platform.

The Telstar, racing ahead of the helicopters, was quickly able to establish contact with Simon and Rich, who were being actively pursued by UNITA. Thanks to dense fog and distance, it took another 90 minutes before the helicopters were able to reach the area and establish contact with Simon. By then, the situation was critical; UNITA had mounted an aggressive follow-up operation and were determined to capture or kill the team. Despite the heavy ground-fog and a torrential downpour, one of the helicopters managed to find an LZ for the extraction. JC Linde felt the rotor blades slicing through trees and undergrowth as he eased his Mi-17 into the small LZ. The on-board protection team reached out into the darkness and pulled the exhausted two-man team into the helicopter. UNITA was close on their heels.

As JC pulled the chopper out of the LZ, UNITA small-arms fire spat at the dark hulk of the helicopter disappearing into the night. Thankfully no one was wounded, but JC was forced to land a few kilometres away to inspect for damages. While the inspection was being conducted in a blanket of rain, the protection team and the two-man reconnaissance team were transferred to Charlie Tait's waiting helicopter.

Their problems were not yet over. JC had inadvertently landed in a swamp and it took all the helicopter's power and the skill of its pilots to prevent the machine from being swallowed up. Drenched in sweat and rain, they were eventually airborne and heading back for Saurimo, 300 kilometres away.

The reconnaissance team's debriefing made it clear that UNITA was preparing to hold Cafunfu at all costs. It was their most strategic asset, from which diamonds flowed to finance the war.

Duncan and Carl were becoming increasingly anxious about having received no word from Renier van der Merwe's three-man team. They could only silently pray that there was an innocuous reason for the silence as they manned Renier's radio frequency. It remained obstinately quiet.

Agents I was running inside UNITA later confirmed that Simon's team had indeed been compromised by locals in the area of Cafunfu. There were also rumours of Renier's team having been captured or killed. The actual report I received stated that UNITA claimed to have captured 'twelve foreign mercenaries, including two white South Africans'. I immediately broached the subject with Lafras who in turn relayed our fears to Duncan. We believed that the two whites had to be Renier and Steyn Marais. With his nerves fraying, Duncan immediately placed all operational tasks on hold and launched a massive search-and-rescue operation to find and extract the missing men.

Day after day, we were kept abreast of the search as the S&R teams combed the danger zone looking for any sign that might lead them to the missing team. The trackers eventually found indications of their presence and spoor that they had left. They also located other tracks indicating that UNITA had been on their tails, but were unable to find evidence of a contact or an ambush. The S&R operation got so close to Cuango that at times they drew UNITA ground-fire, including that of 23mm anti-aircraft guns.

Having exhausted their search options and fearing the worst, Carl Dietz and an eight-man team carried out a snatch operation at a small village in the Cuango area close to where Renier and his team were last known to have been operating. They netted a youngster on the verge of being forcibly conscripted by UNITA. He was only too happy to be dodging forced recruitment, and back at Saurimo, he also proved himself a willing source of information. Carl would later recall:

When I questioned him about Renier's team he claimed everyone knew that UNITA had captured two whites and a black guy and taken them to Jamba[191] in the south. If that was true it could only mean that UNITA intended to interrogate them which at least made us hope they were still alive. He said the villagers didn't know if any of the men had been wounded.

He also told me that, during our hunt for Renier and his team, a UNITA group had arrived the day after we had combed the area around his village and randomly shot three people because no one had warned them of our presence. also managed to get some good intel from him regarding the UNITA deployments at Cuango before the FAA took him to Luanda.

After hearing the news Lafras, Nic van den Bergh and our padre went to inform Renier, Steyn, and Handsome Ndhlovu's families that they had gone missing while executing their duties in Angola. The media had a field day when this news was broken.

Duncan, however, refused to give up hope, and his exhausted teams continued their desperate S&R operation. UNITA had made it known, mainly due to instructions from South Africa, that any EO members captured by them would be summarily executed. We knew that Renier and his team were probably dead. All we could do was hope that their end had been swift and painless.

On 29 March, we finally accepted the fate of Renier and his team. I ordered Duncan to shut down the search-and-rescue operation. I suspected he would never forgive me for that. General De Matos considered the incident so serious that he flew to Saurimo to discuss it with Duncan and his men. Consequently, President dos Santos instructed us to issue a press release claiming that UNITA had illegally kidnapped three of our men while they were on a training exercise.

"I won't issue a lie under the guise of a press release," was my response.

Nevertheless, I finally relented and issued the press release knowing that it wouldn't be believed anyway. I still failed to understand why President dos Santos refused to officially acknowledge our presence in Angola. Had he done so it would have removed a massive burden from our shoulders.

The three-man EO reconnaissance team that went missing in action at Cafunfu. Handsome Ndhlovu (left), Renier van der Merwe (centre), and Steyn Marais

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On 26 March my Strategic Intelligence Summary (SIS 021/94) indicated that UNITA was well aware of our actions. The report stated:

To support their position at the negotiation process in Lusaka, UNITA has decided to intensify its military actions. Such actions are aimed at the following:

4. Intensifying attacks on the logistical convoys from Luanda to Malanje and N'dalatando area.
5. Expanding and intensifying military activities, especially in the Soyo area.

Coupled with this, intensification of FALA[192] actions in the Uige and Zaire areas where mine-laying operations are planned.

6. Intensifying the threat posture in Bie, Malanje, Menongue and Lobito/ Benguela.
7. Deploying reinforcements in the diamond-production areas of Cafunfu and Cuango. Coupled with this, harassment operations/actions aimed at Saurimo.

Comments:
Regarding Saurimo the following UNITA actions can be expected:

• Infiltration operations.
• Sabotage.
• Stand-off bombardments.
• Mining of access routes/runways.

Nic van den Bergh ensured that everyone, including General Itha, was made aware of the report. In the last week of March, the most recently trained elements of 16 Brigade linked up with the forces at Saurimo and readied themselves to launch the advance on Malanje.

General De Matos, however, had other plans. He unexpectedly delayed the advance and ordered that all EO men along with their personal equipment be airlifted back to Cabo Ledo and sent on leave. On their return from leave, the Dange- ia-Menha contingent was to be redeployed to Cabo Ledo to continue with training duties. It was rumoured that De Matos didn't want any more EO casualties.

Taken by surprise, Oom Hennie vehemently protested, but De Matos was still the commander of the FAA and his orders were clear.

We later discovered that this was part of a deception plan that De Matos had put in place to support another FAA action he envisaged elsewhere. He had pulled our men back to confuse UNITA into thinking EO was soon to leave Angola due to South African government pressure. De Matos had however decided to implement a plan I had discussed with him some time before: launching an attack on a small, vulnerable UNITA base to boost FAA morale and make UNITA realise they were no longer dealing with the timid FAA they were accustomed to.

Oom Hennie paid me a courtesy call when he flew back to South Africa. He wanted to make sure I was aware of how disappointed he was about the change in plan. At that time, I had no idea what the FAA General Staff was up to, so I could only sympathise and try to convince him that the generals probably had good reasons.

Oom Hennie probably thought I was merely acting as their apologist.

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Perhaps FAA knew we were ready to exact revenge on UNITA for the loss of our men; or maybe the negative media campaign in South Africa had brought them to their conclusions—but the Angolan General Staff had decided to utilise us as the combat forces to spearhead the advance.

They also started pushing Duncan to attack Camaxillo—another UNITA logistics and transit camp. Duncan discussed this with Nic, who reluctantly agreed to sanction the operation. I wasn't aware of this development, but if I had been, I would have agreed with Nic and Duncan's assessment. Lafras, who was fully au fait with what was happening having spent more time in Angola than I had, also supported the planned action.

Using electronic surveillance equipment, our signallers continued to maintain a listening watch on UNITA's radio nets. Potential targets were relayed to Duncan and Carl, now back at Saurimo, who plotted them, analysed their value and organised action where necessary.

UNITA's vehicle convoys unexpectedly found themselves the targets of PC-7 aircraft that attacked them 24 hours of the day—an aspect of war that UNITA was unfamiliar with. The PC-7s roamed the Angolan sky at night like angry hornets, taking out any targets relayed to them. This created a major disruption of UNITA's logistical and trooping movement because they could no longer rely on the hours of darkness for protection. Intelligence reports began to show a significant decline in UNITA's morale.

Piet Crouwcamp's signal intercept notes showed messages such as:

'Yesterday the jet fighters were flying again and bombs were falling only a few metres away from my position. These days we have to be very alert for jet fighters. Yesterday at 12:30 the enemy's jet fighters dropped a lot of bombs in my area. I am scared they might be returning again today.'

EO mortar teams were also rapidly inserted into UNITA-held areas where they bombarded designated targets and then called helicopters in for extraction, leaving the area after only a few minutes. These highly mobile operations placed UNITA on the defensive and they found themselves constantly harassed either from the air or from the ground.

For the first time in years, UNITA started to run when they heard the unmistakable throb of the Mi-17s approaching. Radio intercepts also showed that there was a significant drop in their will to fight. All this was pleasing to our men but we still remained cautious of UNITA, knowing that they had the capacity to cause us massive damage. After all, even the cowardly jackal, if cornered, will fight—usually to the death.

This jackal however had the full support of DFA, MI, and their many supporters.

EO's range officer, Brett Cleaver, and James Findlay (left) with FAA officers on the range (Photo James Findlay)

15:
The Beginning of the End

By early 1994 it had become crystal clear to every South African that the political landscape was about to undergo a radical shift. In 1990, shortly after having taken up the reins of government, President FW de Klerk had lifted the ban on our erstwhile enemies, the ANC, the PAC, and the SACP, and the first democratic election was scheduled for 27 April 1994. To appease the ANC and the international community, he also disbanded or emasculated all military units that had seen combat. Everyone who had fought, either for or against the old political regime knew that the apartheid system was about to be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Many within the armed forces started realising that the government had been misleading them for years and it now dawned on them that their careers were at risk. Most of the men I knew in the army would have served whichever government was in power—the military was their calling and they didn't care about politics. It was highly unlikely, however, that the new regime would believe this. Indeed, some of the foreign 'advisors' flooding into South Africa warned the ANC of the possibility of a military coup d'état should they win the upcoming election.[193] This advice was totally false; the armed forces saw themselves as apolitical. The ANC nevertheless believed the advice given to them.

It was perfectly obvious to most of us that the ANC would emerge as the victor at the polls. I truly hoped that as the new ruling party, it would put an end to the malicious smear campaign being run by those who were determined to vilify EO. We reasoned (as did the Angolan government) that the ANC would not allow such a thing to continue in light of the support given it by the MPLA during its so-called liberation struggle and its years of exile.

Then it emerged that a Government of National Unity (GNU) would be formed to facilitate a smooth and peaceful transition of power. We discussed amongst ourselves how such a GNU might be exploited by National Party officials and concluded that the offensive against us would not subside in the short term. In fact, we believed it might escalate: as time ran out, people in high places would try to close EO down for 'business reasons' before the new regime found its feet. It also seemed likely that the ANC, being unfamiliar with the machinations of power and politics, would be forced to rely on the 'old guard' for advice and the civil service's bureaucracy would continue to serve National Party die-hards—at least for a few years. As the election day approached, South Africa was becoming restless.

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Political unrest was also growing in the black homeland of Bophuthatswana.

On 8 March former SADF chief General Constand Viljoen met members of the Bophuthatswana National Security Council. The next day President Lucas Mangope addressed the Bophuthatswana Defence Force's troops to reassure them that

Bophuthatswana, although facing difficult times, was not about to give in to ANC demands that it be reincorporated into South Africa.

A few of my agents reported that a potential civil war was looming in the black homeland. They claimed that a 'right-wing force' was planning to 'invade' Bophuthatswana and seize control of the government there. Aware that no one would listen to us, and hoping to prevent bloodshed, we made anonymous phone calls to the police, MI, and the press, to warn them about what was happening. Our warnings fell on deaf ears, and nothing was done to prevent the looming disaster.

A right-wing 'military group' protest as the 1994 elections approach (photo: unknown)

On 10 March Mangope's administration collapsed. There was widespread violence, looting, and political unrest, and General Viljoen and his so-called 'Boere People's Army' were asked to help quell the violence. As the day progressed there was a breakdown in law and order and Eugene Terre'Blanche, leader of the ultra-right- wing Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging[194] (AWB) began to mobilise his so-called 'army' for deployment in Bophuthatswana 'to teach the ANC a lesson'. On 11 March the Boere People's Army (BPA), the AWB, and the Afrikaner Volksfront (AVF) invaded Bophuthatswana's capital, Mmabatho. National and international television viewers watched in astonishment as this undisciplined rabble drove their civilian vehicles into the homeland waving Nazi-style flags and shouting nonsensical right-wing slogans as though en route to a gigantic 'braai'.[195] The right-wing was spoiling for a fight and it was willing to drag South Africa into a racial civil war in the process.

The Bophuthatswana Defence Force resisted the invasion and fought a running gun battle with the AWB in full view of national and international television crews. Three members of the Boere People's Army were shot dead—one execution style as he knelt on the ground—and panic swept through the right-wing groups like a whirlwind: the last thing they had expected was for the 'kaffirs' to fight back. The SADF, which had been standing by, intervened and escorted the humiliated right- wingers out of Bophuthatswana —which undoubtedly saved many of their lives.

A day later (12 March), the incorporation of Bophuthatswana back into South Africa became a minor historical footnote. The substantial attention the media had given the Bophuthatswana debacle took us out of the news, but only briefly.

Had someone listened to our anonymous warnings, lives could most probably have been saved—and humiliation spared.

It was also evident, by this time, that chaos was about to erupt in Rwanda and Burundi. Apart from South Africa having recently supplied weapons and equipment to these troubled and volatile countries, there was talk that South Africans were training their ragtag militias in weapons and tactics.

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In Angola, Carl Dietz and his staff were expanding their on-the-ground agent networks and gathering vital operational and tactical information regarding UNITA deployments, force levels, and TTPs.[196]

Duncan was increasingly deploying the PC-7s to seek out and disrupt UNITA troop movements and deployments. Using available intelligence, Roelf van Heerden's rapid deployment force had been harassing the enemy with lightning strikes and mortar barrages. Targets were accurately plotted by GPS (global positioning systems) and their helicopter landing zones and deployment areas carefully pre-planned. The men were choppered into positions where they set up base plates, laid mortar tubes, and mounted highly accurate stand-off bombardments while the helicopters orbited and made target corrections. They were then uplifted and flown back to Saurimo before UNITA could react. These actions lasted only a few minutes but their effects were both deadly and long felt.

Intelligence indicated that such actions were not only causing heavy casualties, they were also steadily eroding UNITA's morale.

On 6 March, a combined 44-man assault team from EO's Alpha and Delta groups set out for a UNITA stronghold at Xingi. The men were choppered to an LZ from where they spent two days moving through dense bush and hilly terrain to reach their objective. They were to launch a stand-off bombardment of Xingi and they duly fired 80 mortar bombs into the target in quick succession. Polly van Rooyen was wounded in a contact during exfiltration. He was immediately tended to by the medics, and the men were extracted by helicopter after beating off UNITA's forces.

A radio intercept revealed that more than 70 UNITA troops had been killed during the bombardment. Polly soon recovered from his wound and re-joined the company.

Another ground strike on the same day saw Pine Pienaar and Louwrens Bosch battering a newly established UNITA command post at Muhango with rockets from their PC-7s, after which, this command post went quiet—permanently.

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EO search and rescue team, Saurimo, Angola, 1994

On 26 March Johann Smith provided me with his latest intelligence product. Amongst other things he reported:

UNITA is very satisfied with their progress at the negotiation table in Lusaka. They believe their foreign propaganda operations have been successful as the UN and international observers are putting less pressure on them. They also believe they have succeeded in projecting the MPLA as the guilty party in the negotiation process.

UNITA are planning the following:

1. They will attempt to build on initial successes as regards sympathy from the UN.
2. Attempts to discredit the MPLA will be intensified.
3. A major move will be made to ensure the early release of all UNITA prisoners held by the MPLA.

"Johann," I asked, "who is advising Savimbi's negotiating team?"

"Sean Cleary and some DST and Foreign Affairs guys. Cleary has friends at the UN who will draft documents in a way that will shaft both you and the Angolan government," he replied with a laugh.

"Is that why the UN is siding with UNITA and not enforcing its own embargo?" "I'm sure of it. I told you—you've pissed off some important people. You can expect the UN to increase its demands for you to leave Angola—and also to place Dos Santos under massive pressure," he replied. "You have no idea how important Savimbi's diamonds are. There is still a bullet with your name on it out there."

It seemed his assessment wasn't far off the mark. Shortly afterwards I was phoned by a man—claiming to be a Canadian journalist—who asked if the UN had commenced its investigation into Executive Outcomes. I had to wonder who had briefed him but I knew the UN would soon start its own investigation into our 'illegal' contract and try to take some action.

Ironically, they had proven themselves unwilling and incapable when the Angolan government had asked them to intervene and stop the war. That in itself made a mockery of everything they supposedly stood for.

UNITA continued to play for time as it built up its military forces and tried to pressure the Angolan government into terminating the EO contract. Their position at Cacolo was still being supplied by night flights from South Africa and Zaire, and the FAA General Staff desperately wanted to seal the pipeline. Duncan and Carl had unsuccessfully tried to neutralise these aircraft several times. Planning and coordinating such an operation using MiG-23s or deploying small teams with shoulder launched surface-to-air missiles (SAMS) requires perfect intelligence as timing is crucial. Our pilots had also not yet completed their conversion training.

Hoping to put a stop to the flights I went so far as to tell an agent inside MI to report that we planned to shoot down a supply plane, but the flights continued. Those responsible were no doubt being lured by the diamonds with which they were being paid. It was only when our pilots completed their conversion to the MiG-23 MLs that the message got through and the covert flights to Cacolo finally stopped.

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In late March, the PC-7s were again scrambled. Acting on up-to-the-minute signals intelligence, they surprised the wedding party of a UNITA commander at Muriege. As soon as they had identified the target, the PC-7s adopted their attack profile, swooped down, and unleashed their rockets. Although the groom and his bride were lucky to escape the air attack, many of their UNITA guests were not. Once again, radio intercepts confirmed the success of this strike.

The FAA's General Staff had also pressed our men to attack the UNITA logistical area and staging point at Camaxilo. Duncan decided which teams would take part, how the attack would unfold, and how the infiltration and exfiltration would be conducted.

He selected two 23-man teams each with mortar elements and protection teams. By the morning of 2 April, attack plans had been finalised, rehearsals had been conducted, and they were ready for deployment. The plan allowed for a rapid mortar bombardment of the target area followed by a quick helicopter extraction. With weapons zeroed and nerves on edge, they awaited orders. Duncan opted for a mid- afternoon attack instead of the usual first or last light operation, believing this would afford a greater element of surprise.

On the same morning, one of Crause's newly acquired Boeing 727s flew its first trooping mission from Lanseria Airport to Saurimo carrying supplies and men who were returning from leave. When the aircraft landed, a few of these men realised that an operation was about to be launched and pleaded with Duncan to let them accompany the assault teams. Duncan agreed and the assault teams were reinforced with the new arrivals. Kallie Coetzee also clambered aboard one of the helicopters to film the mission.

EO assault team about to be airlifted to Camaxillo. The four men in the door were killed during the attack. A fifth man died later

All this caused a delay and H-hour was moved forward. By late afternoon, the heavily laden Mi-17s, escorted by two armed PC-7s with a third acting as the Telstar, were thundering across the Angolan landscape.

The lead helicopter managed to squeeze into a tight landing zone approximately 600 metres from Camaxilo, and then lifted out of the LZ to make way for the second Mi-17 to come in and unload men. They then went on to perform several other decoy landings around the area to create confusion while the door gunners blazed away to keep UNITA's heads down.

Unbeknown to the assault force, a large UNITA group was concentrated in the dense bush and undergrowth close to the chosen landing zone. On the ground, difficulties with the positioning of the mortars also began to manifest. The bush made spotting the fall of the bombs and the adjustment of fire from the air challenging, and what had been planned as a quick in-and-out mortar bombardment took longer than expected. This gave UNITA valuable time to recover from their initial surprise, regroup, and launch a counter-attack.

Braving heavy UNITA fire, the lead helicopter, flown by Juba Joubert and JC Linde, went in and extracted its team from the LZ. The second helicopter, flown by Charlie Tait and Sonny Janeke, clattered into the LZ as the PKM door gunners blazed away at possible UNITA positions. Carl Dietz was perched on the jump seat between the two pilots as they came into the LZ.

He later described events:

Of course, it was a fucking hairy time. UNITA were really mad at us for being there in the first place. Secondly, we were now 'the enemy' and they had to take us out as quickly as possible. Wishing that I had a spare pair of underpants with me, I stuck a cigarette into my mouth, determined to have a last smoke, even though the pilots didn't approve of us smoking in their choppers. I just thought that day would be my last and if I was going to die, I needed one last smoke before I met my maker.

Our PKMs were blazing away at any perceived cover UNITA might have been using as we came into the LZ. I could hear their guns firing at us above the noise of our engines and our suppressing fire.

I was about to light my cigarette when I saw small holes of daylight appearing in the fuselage of the chopper. The next thing I knew, there was Jet-A1 fuel everywhere. UNITA's fire had ruptured the fuel lines. Had I lit my smoke, we would probably have been blown to hell.

I saw one of the guys taking a hit; then another four guys still on the outside went down. It was chaotic…

High above, the Telstar was monitoring the chaos that had erupted in and around the LZ. They could see Charlie and Sonny's chopper taking heavy incoming fire from all directions. The two armed PC-7s flew into the hail of fire and emptied their rocket pods into the bush, hoping to drive UNITA away from the stricken helicopter.

Sitting on the LZ and taking UNITA fire from several directions, Charlie and Sonny waited calmly for confirmation that their team was safely on board before getting airborne. The door gunners were blazing away furiously and the medics were scrambling through the belly of the shattered helicopter to tend to the wounded, some of whom were still delivering return fire.

The pilots were faced with a terrible decision: take off and save the men already inside the helicopter, or remain on the LZ and possibly sentence everyone to death. They knew that five men were still outside and couldn't be reached. They made the impossible choice and the bullet-riddled Mi-17 slowly clawed its way out of the LZ.

Left behind or barely inside the stricken Mi-17, either dead or severely wounded , were L Coetzer, J Laubscher, R Nitzche, D van Tonder and B Bezuidenhout.

Realising what a dangerously damaged state the helicopter was in, one of the PC-7s raced ahead of the stricken craft, trying to locate an emergency LZ close by.

Louwrens Bosch, who flew one of the PC-7s that day, later told me how the situation had unfolded:

We could see that the chopper was taking a battering from UNITA on the LZ. Smoke was starting to billow from the engine housing and I was expecting the chopper to explode at any moment. We felt completely helpless—there was nothing we could actually do. We couldn't unload any more rockets at UNITA as we had virtually expended our pods, and besides, we now had UNITA visual and they were so close to the chopper that we stood a real chance of knocking out our own helicopter. What struck me was the calmness with which Charlie and Sonny gave us their running commentary on what was

happening. Thank God I didn't have to make the decision…they must have agonised over it. They had no option but to lift out of there, which they barely managed. UNITA gunners were still firing furiously at the chopper as it pulled out of the LZ and struggled to gain altitude. Smoke was pouring out of the chopper ... it was a miracle that they flew that chopper out of there.

Charlie Tait later recounted his experiences on the LZ:

When we came in to land, we suspected this would be a hot landing. As we touched down, Carl put a cigarette in his mouth and was about to light it when we started taking incoming fire from UNITA. We could actually see the rounds punching holes through the aluminium skin of the chopper. UNITA were so close to the LZ that we could hear the bark of their guns. Sonny and I gave each other that 'now we're in deep shit' look but our mission orders were to extract the team. We just sat there like a giant dead duck waiting for the guys to hop in while UNITA continued firing at us. Pretty soon fuel was spraying around the inside of the chopper as bullets cut through the fuel lines. I was praying that Carl wouldn't light his smoke. I told the Telstar that we were taking severe hits and would have to get out of there pretty damn quickly. The radio chatter made it clear that our guys were in trouble and we heard that a few had been hit while still outside of the chopper. UNITA were closing in on us and we were faced with a truly shit choice: stay and die or get the hell out of the LZ. At the time I actually thought our chopper was about to explode. We decided to save whoever we could and with great difficulty, managed to lift out of the LZ. We left some of our own on that LZ.

Barely able to fly their severely damaged helicopter, Charlie and Sonny managed to coax the Mi-17 towards the LZ that the PC-7 had located. Their priority was to get there and offload the men and the cargo. Inside the stricken helicopter the medics worked frantically, trying to stem the flow of blood from the wounded amidst the vapour cloud of highly flammable fuel that was spraying out of the bullet-riddled fuel lines.

After what seemed like a lifetime, the pilots planted the helicopter unceremoniously on the ground at the emergency LZ and the men scrambled clear of the smouldering Mi-17, salvaging whatever equipment and weapons they could. Despite having been through such a terrifying ordeal, they comforted the wounded and waited calmly for their extraction.

Juba and JC hurriedly brought their helicopter in and the wounded, followed by the other survivors (including the pilots) clambered aboard. With 42 men crammed into its cramped confines, the heavily-loaded Mi-17 took off and headed for Saurimo. The critically damaged helicopter was left smouldering on the LZ. Meanwhile, the medics desperately continued their grim task, patching wounds and trying to help whoever they could.

The men were relieved to have survived the day but desperately wanted to get back to the original LZ to rescue their downed comrades. At Saurimo, they begged Duncan and the pilots to send them back to Camaxilo, if not to rescue their fallen friends, then to at least recover their bodies. Realising that however well-intentioned their demands they

would only be risking more lives, Duncan sensibly refused as EO had taken enough punishment for one day. Emotionally drained and physically exhausted after their ordeal the men finally retired to their quarters, too saddened and dazed to continue arguing.

We lost four good men on the ground that day. A fifth died of his wounds in the helicopter. We had also lost one of the very precious FAA helicopters, thus depleting our meagre air resources. The bravery and skill of Charlie, Sonny, Juba, and JC was all that had stood between our men and certain death at the hands of UNITA.

I was out of South Africa when the Camaxilo raid took place. Nico phoned to brief me and give me the sad news. I was devastated by our losses and that night I wept for our men, their families, and our company.

UNITA used the event as a great propaganda coup. Photographs of the bodies of three of our men, taken at Cafunfu, were proudly displayed to the international media. The South African press quickly jumped on to the bandwagon and became even more vociferous in their calls for Executive Outcomes to be shut down. I was also told that there had been great joy at MI when news of our losses filtered in. The DFA issued its normal condemnations against EO. But despite our casualties, we still had a contract to fulfil and I was determined to see it through.

While the intensity and scale of military activities decreased during the second week of April, small-scale operations and guerrilla-type activities, especially by UNITA, continued. Encouraged by UN prevarication, UNITA began to escalate attacks against FAA units and the local population, who they considered to be pro-MPLA in certain areas. This renewal of aggression prompted the Angolan high command to fast-forward their timeline for the proposed offensive against UNITA.

D-Day for the advance on Cafunfu was planned for 21 April, and we did everything we could to keep it secret. We didn't want word to get out in case the South African media tried to warn UNITA by running a story. I didn't even tell Nico in case he inadvertently let it slip during a conversation.

When the EO contingent that had been sent on compulsory leave by General De Matos returned to Angola, they found themselves back at Rio Longa training FAA recruits. To say that Oom Hennie and his men were disappointed would have been an understatement. When I visited Rio Longa, Hennie told me how frustrated he was; he felt he needed to be with 16 Brigade to evaluate how effective their training had been. Having gotten to know Hennie over the past months, I realised he was actually hoping to see some action. Apart from telling him that I understood his point of view, there was not much else I could do or promise. General De Matos was still the supreme commander of FAA.

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On 31 March 1994, the Secretary-General reported a deadlock in the negotiating process to the Security Council. He was convinced that the remaining issues relating to national reconciliation could be resolved if approached with realism and the necessary political will, and urged the parties to the conflict to make every possible effort to show the flexibility needed to reach a comprehensive settlement.

He reiterated that it would be necessary to strengthen UNAVEM II as soon as a comprehensive peace agreement had been reached, and stressed that UNAVEM II would need adequate and timely financial resources in order to consolidate the agreement at its initial and most critical stage. I suspected that everything in Angola revolved about the UN simply resorting to budget-creep.

The MI, the NIS, the DFA, and their associates in the media remained focussed on us during the build-up to the South African election. My Strategic Intelligence Summary of 8 April 1994 reported the following:

UNITA considers the upcoming South African election very important and are obviously hoping the result will allow them to continue using South Africa as a base from which to source equipment.

UNITA plan to continue negotiating with the MPLA to encourage the perception that 'UNITA seeks peace and MPLA seeks war'.

Planning for the negotiations continues and UNITA intends to place the following points on the agenda in Lusaka:

1. New elections in Angola: this will allow UNITA to maximise its propaganda machinery and also imply that the elections won by the MPLA in September 1992 were invalid.
2. Dual control of government ministries and dual governorships which, if accepted, will extend UNITA's power base and influence.

Comment:

UNITA can be expected to intensify its military threat posture while making maximum use of its propaganda machinery. UNITA-controlled journalists, especially in Namibia and South Africa, can be expected to become active in promoting UNITA as the true rulers of Angola and the MPLA as a party only interested in destroying any lawful opposition, regardless of the consequences.

On 14 April 1994, in a letter from its President to the Secretary-General, the Security Council expressed concern about the continuing hostile outbreaks in Angola and reaffirmed the importance its members attached to the 'prompt and successful' conclusion of the Lusaka peace talks. The Council also reaffirmed its readiness, depending on the progress achieved towards the full implementation of their Peace Accords and relevant resolutions, to consider further action in accordance with its previous resolutions.

On 15 April, Johann Smith brought me his most recent intelligence product, from which my Strategic Intelligence Summary SIS 026/94 was compiled. It read as follows:

UNITA has information that the MPLA government has entered into an agreement with the North Koreans that entails a military contract said to be worth US$95 million.

UNITA believes that a large number of North Korean military advisors are already in Angola.

UNITA has reported to the USA that the MPLA has already obtained the following equipment from North Korea: BMP-1s, BMP-2s, BM-21s and T-62 tanks. It has also been provided with military instructors including pilots.

Smith told me that this information had been passed to the US and UNITA via Sean Cleary, the DFA, and MI respectively, and that they were hoping to create the perception that EO was working with or assisting the North Koreans.

This was yet another MI fabrication; we would have known if there were any North Koreans working alongside FAA. Given US animosity towards the North Korean regime, the disinformation was obviously intended to get the US to pressurise the MPLA into suspending our contract. It seemed to me that the overall plan was now to present us as a North Korean ally.

Johann Smith also told me there was a newly established UNITA logistical supply line being run through Zaire. I questioned him about his information.

"So UNITA is still getting equipment from South Africa. Are you sure about that?" "Of course," he said. "Most of the equipment sourced from South Africa is flown to Zaire from Mmabatho in Bophuthatswana. From there it is taken to Angola by road or by air. Get someone to watch Mmabatho airport. They will confirm what I'm saying."

"So this happens under the government's nose and no one in South Africa gives a damn what UNITA is doing?"

"That's it. UNITA will continue to get South African aid—at least until EO has been forced out of Angola. Remember—you are the bad guys. The police will never investigate anyone associated with the good guys."

I didn't trust Smith but I couldn't discard the information he gave me out of hand. I did, however, task other agents in UNITA to confirm or deny his intelligence. Not all his facts always checked out, but I couldn't let him know that I was suspicious of both him and his reports.

After cross checking his information with that of my own agents, I sent out a Strategic Intelligence Summary:

Supplies are being moved from Tshikapa in Zaire via road or by air to Luremo and Cafunfu. From Tshikapa supplies are also being moved to Chitato. UNITA's Chief of Logistics at Luremo is Major Euzebio.

Supplies are still being moved from Mbuji-Mayi to Musef. UNITA's Chief of Logistics at Musef is Captain Zou Zou.

There are frequent Alouette helicopter flights to Chitato. The helicopter, flown by Europeans, normally lands to the west of Chitato. It is unknown if it is flying in supplies but it is known it is collecting diamonds to pay for supplies provided to UNITA.

A UNITA agent had told me on several occasions that a South African known as 'Watson' was part of a South African diamond-buying team with personal links to Savimbi, and one of the channels through which Savimbi bought weapons and munitions. My agent believed Watson either belonged to MI or had once been a member as he

maintained a very close working relationship with them. It was obvious to me that Watson was an alias. I asked Johann Smith about him and he denied having heard the name, but his demeanour suggested that he was lying. I realised too that just asking about Watson would prompt Smith to warn him that we knew of his existence.

Soon after that, another UNITA agent I controlled reported that an ex-South African military officer called Watson—he was unsure of his rank or unit—was helping UNITA to sell diamonds in exchange for weapons and ammunition. My radar immediately switched on when that name cropped up again.

South Africa had strict illicit diamond-buying (IDB) laws and only a few companies were legally engaged in that trade. Watson was working with a Johannesburg-based diamond house owned by two De Dekker brothers. He apparently collected diamonds from UNITA in Angola and then had the De Deckers evaluate their weight, clarity, and colour in Johannesburg, after which he either sold them or smuggled them to Antwerp or Tel Aviv. The proceeds generated were used to purchase weapons and ammunition which were flown to UNITA bases in Angola or Zaire.

UNITA used the proceeds from diamond sales to arm and bolster their forces. Several South Africans aided them (photo: Jim Hooper)

Watson, working on intelligence and advice provided by MI, was also apparently helping UNITA with operational planning aimed at getting EO out of Angola. According to the agent, Watson wanted UNITA to attack and destroy vulnerable EO bases or shoot down an EO aircraft. The agent also said that Watson was closely associated with a Midrand-based company that coordinated Savimbi's propaganda efforts. He didn't know the name of the company—but I could guess it.

Barely a week after our report about UNITA's intentions to intensify its propaganda war against us, an article appeared in the Sunday Tribune of 17 April 1994 which precisely laid out the groundwork we had predicted. It was headlined, 'Claim: MK hit squads being trained in Angola' and had been written by Peta Thornycroft, Sam Sole, and Brendan Seery. The following claims were attributed to Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the founder of 32 Battalion:

Executive Outcomes was training Special Forces for the ANC. Executive Outcomes was training MK hit squads in Angola.

There were 'close links' between the ANC and Executive Outcomes.

Many of us had held Breytenbach in high esteem, but now, it seemed, he had become part of the pro-UNITA lobby group, making malicious and false statements in line with MI and DFA's policies towards us. His statement also contradicted very negative comments he had previously made about UNITA on record.

Breytenbach was also quoted as saying that some Executive Outcomes members were already doing work for the ANC, and that after the elections they would be used to 'take out' individuals suspected of 'counter-revolutionary activity'. He claimed that General Constand Viljoen was number one and he, Breytenbach, was number two on the EO hit list. Ironically, these statements were attributed to a man who had commanded Hippo Base in the Caprivi, Namibia, where the SADF had tried to neutralise the liberation movement by covertly training members of the Zulu dominated Inkatha Freedom Party 'to attack the ANC and UDF inside KwaZulu-Natal'.

Colonel Jan Breytenbach, a man I had great respect for, lied to the media about EO. I lost my respect for him that day (photo: Galago)

Breytenbach, said to be an attendee of far-right-wing meetings, had apparently found it 'amusing' that the Caprivi-trained IFP members were to be used as hit squads in violence-wracked Kwa-Zulu Natal. I later learnt that monies for this covert training had been drawn from Project Spyker, the secret fund that also financed UNITA.[197] Colonel Jan Breytenbach, it appeared, had a lot to hide and was possibly trying to divert attention from himself.

Breytenbach was a man I had held in particular high esteem but my respect for him died that day.

The Sunday Tribune article, however, encouraged members of the ANC to establish direct communications with us. This suited me well: although I had ANC members working for me, I wasn't sure how the party's hierarchy would react to me approaching them in order to explain our contract.

On 18 April, an agent I was running inside of MI handed me part of a classified MI document which stated:

It is reported that the ANC and Executive Outcomes have reached an agreement in keeping potential 'troublemakers' out of the country. If the ANC should win the upcoming election, they will turn a blind eye to the company's activities. This has been confirmed by a 'political secretary-general'.

I was astonished. We had not yet met anyone belonging to the ANC's hierarchy, let alone its unnamed 'political secretary-general'.

A few days later Nico phoned to say he had been contacted by Chippie Shaik of the ANC's intelligence department who wanted to know what we were doing in Angola. I told Nico to invite Chippie to accompany me to Angola on my next visit and see for himself. I made arrangements for Wessel Jordaan, an EO member who was also a member of the ANC and a friend of Shaik's, to accompany us.

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UNAVEM II was still fumbling around unproductively despite the growing human tragedy that was unfolding in Angola. 'Peacekeeping' had become a non- meaning sound byte; a euphemism for 'talk a lot and do nothing'. I couldn't help wondering when the UN would effectively involve itself in stopping wars—and not just talk about stopping them.

On 19 April, Malanje Airport and the city itself were shelled while a World Food Programme aircraft was unloading cargo and humanitarian flights to the city were temporarily suspended.[198] The UN continued to express dismay at the deteriorating situation, but did nothing to stop it or even intervene.

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On 20 April the Namibian Afrikaans newspaper, Die Republikein, published an article headlined, 'Finger points to Namibia'. Translated extracts read as follows:

An unholy alliance between the African National Congress of South Africa and the controversial security company from Pretoria, Executive Outcomes, has involved the Namibian government in the Angola bush war.

Die Republikein also alleges that Executive Outcomes is actively engaged in training murder gangs in Angola.

Another shocking allegation is that this company apparently reached agreement with the ANC to ensure that 'the largest possible number of ex-specialist soldiers will be taken to Angola before the elections, to prevent violence and diminish support for right-wing parties to neutralise them'... It is also alleged that Executive Outcomes has begun with a comprehensive brain-washing programme of its own fighters in Angola to ensure they are 'positively disposed' towards the type of work they will be doing in that country.

According to an unofficial murder list supplied to the murder gangs, the name of General Constand Viljoen, the ex-Chief of the South African Defence Force appears as a potential threat to the ANC while the founder of the erstwhile 32 Battalion (Buffalo Battalion) and outspoken anti-communist Colonel Jan Breytenbach's name is number two on the list.

Die Republikein happily overlooked the fact that our black members (who outnumbered our white members by about five to one) would most certainly never have been welcomed into any Afrikaner white right-wing group. This was obviously deemed irrelevant. Such nonsense clouded the real issues at stake in Angola.

Breytenbach's lies were also included to further spice up their attempts at deceit and to add a semblance of credibility.

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After much discussion, 16 Brigade was reorganised into two balanced battle groups: Battle Group A (Alpha) under the command of Colonel Nevis (a Soviet- trained mechanised infantry officer) and Battle Group B (Bravo), (commanded by Brigadier Pepe de Castro). Brigadier Pepe was also the effective commander of the 16 Brigade as the FAA-appointed commander was seldom present. Alpha consisted of three combat teams with their attached echelon vehicles.

An EO BMP crew on parade at Saurimo prior to the advance on Cafunfu

The advance on Cafunfu from Saurimo commenced on 21 April 1994. Attached to Colonel Nevis' Battle Group Alpha were EO's combat team along with elements of Saurimo's Rapid Deployment Force under the command of Colonel Roelf van Heerden.

Battle Group Alpha's advance appeared to be going according to plan, despite some technical problems with the BMP infantry fighting vehicles and initial teething problems with logistical support. Their first major target en route to Cafunfu was to be Cacolo, partly to add to the deception plan (making UNITA believe that Cafunfu was not the final objective) and partly to ensure that no UNITA forces would be able to stay behind and dominate that area or attack the logistical supply lines. Once Cacolo had fallen, Brigadier Pepe de Castro's Battle Group Bravo would advance from Malanje to Cacolo as planned, and link up with Battle Group Alpha for the final advance on Cafunfu as a unified 16 Brigade.

It was appreciated that this approach via two routes and the subsequent pincer movement on Cacolo would force UNITA to spread its troops across both approaches, substantially weakening its forces.

Battle Group Alpha had to deviate from the initially planned advance route and cross at the Luachimo River far to the south-west as UNITA had apparently destroyed the steel-span bridge across the Alto Cuilo River, hoping to isolate the garrison at Saurimo and delay any offensive from there.

Having established their bridgehead across the Luachimo, the battle group headed cross-country towards the UNITA position at Dala which lay on the Tchihumbe River south of Saurimo between Battle Group Alpha and the new advance route they were to follow. The advance on UNITA's positions there added to a growing confusion within UNITA's ranks and hierarchy and added to the overall deception as the campaign unfolded.

Following principles of warfare and advance, it was agreed that the battle group would move towards Cafunfu from firm tactical base to firm tactical base. Any opposition along its route would be systematically destroyed as they did not want UNITA rear-guard elements harassing the column. If Nevis, in consultation with Roelf, decided that the opposition was of no consequence, it would simply be by-passed. It was, however, important that wherever possible, the enemy would be engaged and destroyed as this would deny them manpower, result in materiel losses, and dent their morale.

As Battle Group Alpha cautiously approached Dala, most of the civilians hurriedly gathered up their meagre possessions and fled into the bush away from the line of fire, knowing they would become spectators and possibly casualties of an FAA/EO clash with UNITA if they stayed in the area.

After a hectic and sharp firefight, Dala's defenders hurriedly retreated into a school hall in the town, ready to defend their position. Not prepared to take any unnecessary chances, waste ammunition, or delay the advance any further, Roelf called in an air strike on the building.

Louwrens Bosch was immediately scrambled from Saurimo in his PC-7. Wanting to assess the situation from the air and monitor the results of the air strike, Carl Dietz accompanied him as an observer. They also hoped to locate and engage additional UNITA targets or troop concentrations.

Coming in low over the target area, Roelf gave Louwrens a target description, and working off compass bearings and ground chatter, Louwrens and Carl were soon able to identify the target.

The men on the ground watched as the PC-7 rolled in for its attack. Louwrens corrected his firing position and seconds later, the rockets slammed into the building, causing havoc amongst the UNITA defenders. The PC-7 pulled up and sped into an orbit, waiting for further instructions.

Roelf and his men cautiously advanced towards the smoking building and did a damage assessment. Louwrens was informed that the majority of the UNITA troops had been killed in the strike. Several trying to flee into the surrounding bush were quickly cut down by EO gunfire. Numerous blood trails were found, indicating that several UNITA troops had also been wounded. The men warily swept through the area, looking for more UNITA troops to kill or capture. Not finding any, they took up their positions in the force and continued with the advance.

Circling above the target area, Louwrens soon spotted an opportunity target. A UNITA vehicle, fleeing from Dala, was racing hell-for-leather towards Cacolo, the next large UNITA stronghold along the battle group's route of advance. Realising that he and his passengers would feature in the sights of the circling PC-7 within a matter of moments and unable to out-race the aircraft, the panic-stricken driver tried to swerve off the road, overturning the vehicle in the process. Several rockets later, the vehicle was a smouldering wreck with several bodies scattered around it and the PC-7 returned to Saurimo.

It wouldn't be long before UNITA's troops heard that Battle Group Alpha had taken Dala, dealt them a devastating blow, and were advancing towards Cacolo. We all knew what this would do to their morale; never before had they been swept off the map with such aggression, ferocity, and speed.

Meanwhile, UNITA had started to focus activities in several different areas in an obvious attempt to distract and divert the FAA's advance and also to create the impression that they controlled most of Angola's provinces. Their attempts at deception failed. Indeed, they merely weakened their own positions as men were withdrawn to act in other areas.

By the time Nevis and his Battle Group Alpha moved into their laager position for the night, they knew that they had dealt UNITA its first very serious defeat on the advance route. Several more would soon follow.

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On 23 April 1994, Britain's The Economist published an article titled 'Help from Zaire':

Driven to Kinshasa's N'djili airport at 02.00 in the morning fifteen passengers were rushed past Zairian army guards, on to the tarmac and aboard an unmarked transport plane. Not a passport was inspected, not a bag examined, not a visa required.

Such are the night flights into UNITA-held territory in Angola. Though they break the UN embargo, the occurrence of this and other cross-border traffic is an open secret in

neighbouring countries.

The report went on to say that both Zaire and Zambia were blatantly supporting UNITA while their leaders looked on, contentedly sipping South African wines. The report didn't mention that a lot of the equipment being transshipped was South African in origin. Zaire made no attempt to deny the allegations and the UN, for all its claims of wanting peace in Angola, were happy to turn a blind eye. The media in South Africa also ignored the report.

Investigative journalist De Wet Potgieter showed no interest in investigating South Africa's violation of UN sanctions despite me having given him a lot of information to prove my allegations. He and his fellow journalists found a legitimate contract between a legitimate government and a legitimate company far more sinister.

My agents continued to report on the regular night flights between South Africa and Zaire, and from there to UNITA-held areas in Angola, particularly Cafunfu. Again no action was taken to monitor these flights, apparently because there was 'no radar coverage in South Africa'. Strangely enough, no one thought to physically check cargo on aircraft flying out of Mmabatho or even to confirm that manifests tallied with goods on board. Most EO flights were subject to these checks by customs officials.

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In late April I received a cryptic phone call from someone who asked me to meet him in Europe. I was anyway planning to fly to the UK to see Tony Buckingham about the possibility of Heritage Oil and Gas employing EO for security purposes once the war was over. With pressure mounting on both myself and the company, I was concerned that if the Angolan contract was abruptly terminated, there would be no other business to fall back on.

The caller's accent indicated he was not European but more likely from an Arabic speaking country. We exchanged mobile contact numbers and confirmed the date for a meeting in London.

Lafras was visiting Angola, so I discussed the call with Nico while briefing him on how to look after things during my absence. In his usual concerned manner, Nico told me he was worried I might be walking into a trap. We knew Moroccan Special Forces had been, and possibly still were, operating alongside UNITA because my men had killed a few of them at Soyo.

"What if this is a Moroccan agent who wants to eliminate you?"

"To be safe I'll meet him in a crowded place. If he is some sort of hit man he'll have to shoot me in full public view. I don't think he'll chance that."

I arranged my meeting with Buckingham and left for London a couple of days later.

I was detained at Heathrow Terminal Four by a stern-faced immigration official who, no doubt having found me flagged on his computer, led me to an isolated area and told me to sit down. He left me alone for about 90 minutes during which time I was most certainly photographed and my reaction gauged.

Then two officials questioned me, presumably to determine how big a terrorist threat I was to Britain. I wasn't treated badly but I could tell I wasn't exactly welcome either. I didn't even get offered the obligatory cup of tea.

I was asked the usual questions about where I would be going, who I would be visiting, when I would be leaving, and why I had come into the country. I said nothing about my proposed meeting with my anonymous Arab caller; they would probably have taken that as confirmation that I was a terrorist.

I remained polite but inwardly cursed them, although in retrospect they were only doing their jobs. They seemed to be enjoying their moment of power way too much for my liking. After a few more questions and answers I was told to wait again and the interrogators went off, probably to check up on what I had told them. When they returned they told me I was free to leave.

Apart from laughing off the implications of being on the data base of international criminals and terrorists, I realised that the disinformation being spread about EO and the revelations about my CCB past were catching up with me. There was obviously liaison between elements of the South African intelligence community and the British authorities. Ironically, the British hadn't realised they were being misled to suit the aims of others in South Africa.

My enforced wait to enter the United Kingdom gave me time to review the absurdity of my situation. Here I was in Britain, the so-called land of democracy and free speech, being treated as an undesirable character—whereas those self-same islands had for many years been a haven for terrorists and dissidents from all over the world. In fact, they actually paid them unemployment and other benefits.

Feeling decidedly agitated I took the tube from Heathrow and got to Buckingham's expansive offices almost three hours late. Buckingham greeted me with his usual enthusiasm and introduced me to Sir Tim Torrington and Rupert Bowen. It appeared that Sir Tim was working with Buckingham while Bowen was soon to leave HM Foreign Office to join Heritage Oil as a political analyst.

My meeting with Buckingham didn't go as well as I had hoped.

"With all the bullshit in the South African papers about you, it wouldn't do our image any good to employ EO in any way." he said frankly. "The British press have picked up selected bits that suited them and it now seems that both I and my company are also planning to invade the world. For that reason we have decided to reduce our exposure. At least for the time being, we are only using UK-based companies for security work."

"Well that's fucking great, Tony," I said, "we were good enough for you at Soyo where I personally had to bear the brunt of all the shit that was flying around. I even had to publicly defend you, your company, and whoever else was in the mix and now you say you can't use us."

"Look, if it was only the crap that has been written about you, it wouldn't have been too much of a problem. The truth is British Intelligence has started looking at me in a rather alarmingly askance fashion. I want them to go away."

Despite my disappointment I understood his reasoning.

"All right," I said as he saw me to the door, "but if you hear of any companies or governments who have problems, will you at least mention me?"

"I'll certainly do that," he promised.

I phoned my mystery caller and arranged to meet him at the Hyde Park Hilton. He gave me a physical description of himself and said his name was Hussein. He would be carrying a black briefcase and wearing a white shirt, a yellow tie, and a dark blue pinstripe suit with a red flower in the buttonhole. Reflecting on his description, I suspected that he was an avid reader of spy novels.

I took a cab to the hotel and stood in a small side-street to monitor any unusual activity in the area. He hadn't had sufficient warning to deploy backup forces prior to my arrival but I was taking no chances.

I saw him approaching the hotel and made a snap decision to meet him in the street before he entered the hotel lobby. I reasoned that if he was some kind of hit- man, MI5 or Special Branch would probably have him under surveillance. If I was killed, at least they would be able to identify the culprit.

We entered the hotel together, found a quiet area in the lobby, and settled down in armchairs.

"May I get you something to drink, Mr Hussein?" I asked.

"In my country I cannot drink alcohol," he said with a smile, "but we are in London, so I would like a large whisky."

I ordered coffee for myself.

"How can I be of assistance?" I asked.

"I'll be perfectly frank, Mr Barlow. I'm from the Iraqi Armed Forces and I've been instructed to establish contact with you for two reasons. The first is that you have a close working relationship with the president and the generals in Angola and we would like to establish discreet contact with them. The second is that we would like you to train a very special little unit inside our own armed forces."

"Firstly," I replied, "I will gladly convey your wish to establish contact with the Angolan General Staff, but you will appreciate that I cannot mediate such a meeting. In a real sense I'm only a hireling of theirs. Secondly, what do you want this 'very special little unit' to do?"

"You may or may not know it, but we have enemies all around us and we might need to exact some form of retribution against them if it is Allah's will. We understand from the newspapers that you are very experienced in a shooting war as well as in a cold war. Such wide experience is rarely found."

I became rather alarmed. The message I was getting suggested that his government wanted us to train a group to conduct a specialised type of operation that the Iraqis themselves didn't want to be part of. The political, military, and religious implications were enormous. I had to play for time. Knowing how easily the once-powerful National Party government had thrown its secret units to the dogs, I had lost all faith in governments wishing to establish such forces. If anything they were involved in went wrong, they would deny responsibility and blame us.

"Training such a special unit would cost an awful lot of money," I said, hoping to narrate EO out of the discussion.

"We have all the money in the world so that will be no problem," he responded. "I will have to discuss this with my senior staff before I can make a commitment.

My company is very tied up at the moment, so if we decide to assist it might not be in the immediate future."

"I understand completely. Can you discuss this with your people tonight and call me on the same phone number at 10:00 tomorrow? My government believes it is of prime importance to get the formation and training of this unit under way as soon as possible."

I had no intention whatsoever of undertaking the training of an Iraqi special team, but I agreed to call him the next morning. Before parting company, we spent some time discussing the Middle East and what he called American aggression in the region. He obviously hated the Americans and the British. It struck me again what a strange world we were living in; we would never have been able to have the same discussion over a whisky in Baghdad. The more he drank the louder he became in his condemnation of everything the West stood for. This was dangerous territory so I only nodded in acceptance of his sentiments, feeling as though the whole of London was listening to us.

After my two coffees and his six whiskies we parted Company.

I called him the next morning and told him it was possible we would be in a position to assist his government eight to twelve months hence. I was lying, but I didn't want him to think I had rejected his offer outright.

I flew back to South Africa that evening.

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Within South Africa, dramatic events were unfolding. On 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first general election and citizens of all races were allowed to cast their votes for a new political dispensation and by implication, a new government. Millions of newly registered voters queued for three days to cast their votes. As was expected, the African National Congress won, along with support from the labour confederation COSATU and the South African Communist Party.

I landed at Jan Smuts Airport[199] the day South Africa went to the polls. Holding the aircraft at a safe distance, the pilot announced that there had been a bomb blast in the terminal building; he had been instructed to taxi away and park in a safe area.

Two days was a long time to be out of the loop. I briefed Nico what had transpired at my meetings with Buckingham and Hussein. He, in turn, told me that the media had refused to give up on their disinformation campaign and that according to them, we were now definitely working in Rwanda or Burundi or both. He also told me that he suspected I had been the bomber's intended target. I had been warned some time before that a car bomb might be used to kill me but I thought nothing more of this incident. According to the late researcher and author Peter Stiff, this was the third bombing attack in a failed war launched by the Afrikaner right-wing to stop the forthcoming election.

The next morning Business Day ran the following:

Police have arrested 31 white right-wingers in connection with the spate of bombings in the PWV area that have killed 21 people and injured 176 in the past week. The arrests included members of the AWB and its elite Ystergarde unit, a policeman, and a reservist.

The announcement came hours after yesterday's car bomb at Johannesburg's Jan Smuts Airport injured sixteen people and caused massive structural damage to the north face of the building.

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On 29 April, I took Chippie Shaik to Angola.

The aim of Chippie's visit was to see first-hand what we were really doing and to determine if there was any truth in media claims that we were training 'hit squads' for some South African political grouping. The Sunday Tribune's misleading 17 April article and Jan Breytenbach's comments had alarmed the ANC and they wanted to see if there had been any substance to them. They didn't want a repeat of the KwaZulu-Natal situation (where IFP hit squads had been trained under Breytenbach's supervision at Hippo Base).

Chippie Shaik of the ANC, the author, and Wessel Jordaan (EO and ANC member) on an EO-sponsored visit to bases in Angola. Shaik had been tasked to see what EO was really up to

We first flew to Cabo Ledo where I introduced Chippie to several of our men. After breakfast he was briefed on the elements we had deployed, their strengths, and their tasks. He asked if he could visit some of the deployment areas to see what we were doing for himself so that he could report back to the ANC.

This posed no problem to us and he was given a guided tour of all facilities except for Saurimo.

I explained that the FAA and our men were preparing for offensive operations in the Lunda Norte Province and I didn't think it would be appropriate to go there while this was happening. We would also have needed permission from the FAA General Staff and that would not easily have been granted. Chippie accepted this with some reluctance. Additionally, the advance from Saurimo on Cafunfu had already commenced and we did not want Chippie to be privy to that information.

I gained the impression that Chippie felt comfortable in the company of soldiers, despite many of us having once stood on opposite sides of the fence. He also met many EO staff and employees at various places and he told them what a great job they were doing. Our men, both black and white, received Chippie well and asked him many questions about South Africa's future under an ANC-led government. These frank discussions seemed to dispel many of their concerns.

He then asked to meet the Angolan Chief of the Armed Forces, General De Matos. Nic van den Bergh hastily arranged a meeting and I accompanied Chippie to Luanda where we were met by Major Antonio Lucas (our FAA liaison officer) who ushered us into the general's office.

Despite suffering from a severe bout of malaria, De Matos welcomed us warmly but first called me aside to tell me that UNITA's base at N'dalatando had fallen to FAA forces earlier that morning.[200] N'dalatando was a strategic UNITA base area from which a number of operations had been mounted against Luanda. The attack had been conducted by an EO-trained combat team which had suffered only four casualties. EO had provided much of the input for the operation and some of our men had accompanied the combat team to ensure adherence to the tactical plan. This was the first major defeat that UNITA had suffered at the hands of the 'new FAA'.

General De Matos was clearly thrilled with the results. He put his arms around my shoulders and said, "Well done, General! I now have the fullest confidence in EO." He felt the time was now ripe to launch Battle Group Bravo's advance on Malanje, and as all of my men returned from leave, preparations were finalised. As previously discussed, he had wanted the attack on N'dalatando to be both a deception plan and an action to throw UNITA off balance. He also regarded it as a final evaluation of EO's training.

I assumed Chippie wanted to ask the general about our activities, but to my surprise that wasn't the case. Instead, in my presence, he directly asked De Matos if FAA would consider terminating our contract and instead awarding it to the ANC or to an ANC-owned company. It took a few moments for Chippie's request to sink in, as the general wasn't sure he had heard correctly.

When the request was reiterated, his reaction was astonishment followed by anger. He told Chippie in no uncertain terms that he didn't trust the ANC and reminded Chippie of how the MPLA, at great cost, had supported the ANC during its time in Angola while in exile. He went on to say that if they really respected the MPLA government for its efforts to bring about peace and economic stability, he believed they would have made their position known earlier.

Chippie lamely tried to explain the ANC's position; he felt it was suitably qualified to train the FAA to create peace and stability in Angola. An astonished and clearly angry De Matos wasn't interested.

Although I was angry at Chippie's gauche approach, I couldn't blame him—he was most probably trying to do what many others were trying to achieve secretly: get us out of Angola and seize the contract for training FAA for themselves. At least he'd had the courage to ask for it in my presence and I had to respect that.

Later that day, without Chippie at my side, I met with General Itha to discuss what I saw as an imminent new media offensive against EO, especially in light of the FAA victory at N'dalatando. Although I felt we could almost certainly shrug off insinuations that the attack had been carried out by EO, I nevertheless pleaded for President dos Santos to make an official statement detailing the terms of our contract. I was certain that this would help to relieve some of the immense pressure on us—and especially on me. General Itha, however, believed it was in the FAA's interest for the media to attribute victories to us, even when we had not taken part. He thought it posed a greater threat to UNITA's morale. I told him I disagreed and when I pressed him, he reluctantly agreed to discuss it with President Dos Santos, but I don't think he ever did.

"If everything goes like N'dalatando did, we'll soon win this war," the general commented.

He was right.

The FAA's success and their subsequent consolidation in the area proved to be the beginning of the end for UNITA. Their shock at having been overwhelmed in what they had thought was a secure position began to undermine their determination to hold on to other base areas. It also signalled the prelude to a major increase in desertions from their ranks.

My agents and other sources said that UNITA had been shocked, not only by the audacity of the FAA attack but also by their victory. This small success on a large battlefield was vital to the FAA's continued will to fight and to its esprit de corps. The FAA now knew that it could defeat UNITA on the battlefield. Conversely, the fall of N'dalatando had a very negative impact on UNITA's morale. We expected them to step up their campaign to have us removed from Angola in a hurry.

UNITA's defeat also gave the war-weary ordinary citizens of Angola hope that maybe the end of the war was in sight. God only knows how much they needed that.

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At around this time, I was informed that operatives claiming to represent 'intelligence' had been snooping around Lanseria trying to obtain copies of our passenger and cargo lists. As we occasionally used privately-owned Lanseria-based charter aircraft to move personnel or cargo, it struck me that some form of sabotage (such as a bomb on board one of the aircraft) might be a possibility. We immediately started searching all aircraft leaving for Angola. The snooping operatives also tried to obtain address lists for all our personnel. I interpreted this as a very real threat to the families of our men and we subsequently made certain that address lists were tightly controlled.

Johann Smith told me that Sean Cleary had been leaking 'information' about Executive Outcomes (again) having been contracted by the MPLA to assassinate Jonas Savimbi. The fee we would supposedly have earned for having carried out this deed was US$20 million. It struck me as more than coincidental that this was the same amount I had been offered to close down the company and withdraw my men from Angola. This rumour, and others, persisted until long after we had left Angola.

It was clear that our adversaries were trying to force a massive investigation into our 'criminal' activities and have the company shut down. My public response was that if the Savimbi assassination story were true, he would already have been dead and EO would have had the US$20 million in its pocket. His death would surely have disrupted UNITA and maybe brought the war to an abrupt close, so the idea actually wasn't a bad one.

Our attorneys, Wilsenach, Van Wyk, Goosen and Bekker, issued a press release on our behalf:

Over the past few weeks it has again become apparent that Executive Outcomes is being targeted by parties purporting to be the company's employees, or they are members of the Intelligence community.

The Lanseria based air charter company contracted by Executive Outcomes has also been approached by 'intelligence' who have demanded copies of all EO's passenger and cargo lists. This information which the operatives deem so important and crucial is freely available at EO's offices should they go there and ask for it. Furthermore, insinuations that cargo is being removed from South Africa without the knowledge of Customs and Excise is a blatant lie and Executive Outcomes wishes to place on record that it has an excellent working relationship with both Customs and Immigration at Lanseria.

Malicious rumours that Executive Outcomes is supposedly training 'secret ANC members' can be construed as efforts by pro-UNITA elements in South Africa to discredit both President Mandela's administration and Executive Outcomes. Should any member of the public become aware of any illegal activity by any member of Executive Outcomes, it is asked that they immediately contact the police who will deal with the information in the correct manner.

This continuing disinformation generated by the advisor of Dr Savimbi of UNITA, who incidentally, is located in South Africa, is rejected with the contempt it deserves. Executive Outcomes finds it unbelievable that a terrorist and criminal organisation that has engaged in mass murder in Angola, devastated that country's economy and infrastructure and which has completely ignored the results of a democratic election, can be advised by a South African company, as is presently the case.

The press release had little to no effect; the media simply ignored it. It was obvious that our statements did not carry the same weight or sensation value as the false information they were receiving from their 'undisclosed sources'. Nor did they appear to be interested in what was really happening in Angola.

By then I had recruited two agents within the SAP's headquarters. From what they reported it was clear that MI, the DFA, and Sean Cleary's Strategic Concepts were leading the malleable media by the nose. At least we had positively identified our enemies. The SAP was being bombarded with requests to investigate EO and myself for fabricated crimes ranging from weapon smuggling to drug dealing and worse.

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Lafras returned from another of his many visits to Angola and briefed me on 16 Brigade's advance on Cafunfu. Our men, acting as a combat team for Battle Group A, were at times acting as the vanguard for the battle group and at times, as the rear guard. "How do the men feel about the situation?" I asked. "We initially recruited them purely to train the FAA. Now they are gearing up for war—are they okay with that?' "Morale is at an all-time high. Duncan, however, feels that there are some chancers at Saurimo who seem to think they're in some Rambo-type movie. He'll keep a close watch on them. You know how it is: some guys are always loud-mouthed until the shooting starts. I'm sure things will go exactly as we planned with Roelf in command."

I just wanted the retaking of Cafunfu to be over, as it would truly spell the beginning of the end of UNITA.

"Perhaps we ought to go up and take part in the operation," I suggested to Lafras. "No, I don't think so," said Lafras. "Duncan, Roelf, and Carl have things under control and Nic is maintaining a very close liaison with the FAA General Staff. I think we should allow them their own judgement. Besides, if we enter the mix now, the men might feel that we don't trust the abilities of their commanders."

I accepted his reasoning and we silently hoped that the operation would be successful.

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Having taken 62% of the votes, the ANC formed a Government of National Unity with the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party—as required by the Interim Constitution. The newly formed National Assembly's first act was to elect Nelson Mandela as the country's first black president. National Party supporters were shocked as de Klerk and his cronies had assured them that the National Party would emerge victorious from the elections.

Outgoing President de Klerk celebrates incoming President Mandela's victory (photo: ISS)

I couldn't help wondering what the UN would have done if outgoing President de Klerk had rejected the results of the South African election and taken up arms to overthrow the newly elected ANC-led government. Would they have tried to talk the problem away over

copious amounts of tea as they were doing in Angola, or would they have taken decisive action to stop it?

The political landscape in South Africa underwent rapid changes. South Africa's new Government of National Unity was presided over jointly by President Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, who, with Thabo Mbeki, was one of two deputy presidents. It signalled no immediate change in policies. The ANC members of the GNU were still trying to swim in the big pond of politics and were blissfully unaware of the deception happening under their very noses.

The newly elected government acted quickly to bring about changes to the intelligence community. The National Intelligence Agency soon underwent a name change and became the National Intelligence Service (NIS). The new agency consisted of two divisions: an internal division mainly responsible for domestic counter-intelligence, and an external division responsible for intelligence collection beyond South Africa's borders. This external division became known as the South African Secret Service (SASS). Its director was Barry Gilder of the South African Communist Party. I had never met Gilder but I had become aware of the work he was doing for the ANC while I was an agent handler with the Directorate of Covert Collection.

Bertie Jackson, the National Intelligence operative I had been liaising with, was now posted to SASS. By then he had told me that their analysts had come to believe I was feeding them disinformation designed to deflect attention away from Executive Outcomes and the threat it posed to South Africa's national security as it was contrary to what MI, DFA, Cleary and the media were telling them.

"Are they fucking stupid?" I asked, "How the hell can they think that?"

"For a start," Bertie said, "the intelligence you have been giving me directly contradicts that which is being passed to us by MI, the DFA and some concerned citizens and large corporations. As you know, MI and DFA are both large, established, and credible organisations. Secondly, the analysts work in a vacuum—they don't know who the SIG belongs to; they just analyse whatever is passed on to them. Why should they believe you?"

"Why don't they just send an operative to Luanda with us so he can establish for himself who is telling the truth and who is lying?"

"I'm sure our people would like to accept your offer. But what if you are setting a trap for our operative? Anyway, I'll discuss it with Barry Gilder. Are you willing to meet him?"

I said I was and a meeting was promptly arranged.

At the meeting, Gilder confirmed much of what Bertie had told me. The countless intelligence reports I had fed to Bertie were being disregarded in favour of disinformation. We were clearly farting against thunder but I nevertheless continued to provide the SIG reports in the naive hope that one day SASS would realise that they had been misled.

I sent a message to Generals De Matos and Itha informing them of the result of my meeting with Gilder. Despite their anger at the stupidity of SASS, they both agreed that inviting an SASS operative to Angola might help to relieve the pressure on EO in South Africa. It would be up to SASS to make the next move.

Shortly afterwards Bertie introduced me to Marius Bartlett, nominated by SASS to find out for himself what 'criminal activities' we were supposedly up to. Bartlett soon flew to Angola where he was embedded in EO to monitor our actions and report back to SASS.

James Findaly poses with propaganda mural, Saurimo (Photo James Findlay)

16:
UNITA Attack Saurimo

On 6 May, one of my MI agents confirmed that I had indeed been the target of the car bomb detonated at Jan Smuts Airport. He added that several people at MI's Liberty Life building were bitterly disappointed that I was still around. Whether this was true or not, I would never know. What I did know was that the media had become hopelessly entangled in their own lies and I was highly sceptical about their reports on the incident. I reminded myself to keep a closer watch on my back. I also recalled words to the effect that when people continually claim they want you dead, it is wise to believe them.

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By mid-May 1994, the war in Angola was entering what was arguably its most crucial phase.

The military situation remained tense throughout the country, as both the government and UNITA continued to conduct military operations in several provinces. As a result of continuing hostilities, emergency relief flights to some locations were disrupted. Although claiming to want an end to hostilities, UNITA kept trying to find ways to stall the negotiating process in Lusaka.[201] The Angolan generals viewed UNITA's stalling tactic as a move designed solely to win time, build up forces, and create a sense of complacency in Angola—specifically within FAA. I agreed entirely with their summation of the situation.

UNAVEM II remained at its 'reduced strength', but while negotiations in Lusaka continued, the Secretariat and UNAVEM II had stepped up their contingency planning in anticipation of a comprehensive settlement.

The FAA General Staff seemed to have adopted a 'now or never' attitude, and Executive Outcomes' training teams at Rio Longa worked exceptionally hard to prepare the young recruits for battle. Elements of the company were also involved in 16 Brigade's push to Malanje. Out in the east at Saurimo, Battle Group Alpha continued its advance. Duncan Rykaard's Rapid Deployment Force continued harassing UNITA with helicopter-borne assaults, mortar bombardments, and air raids while simultaneously building up the intelligence picture of the enemy through aerial and ground reconnaissance.

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Back in South Africa, an apparently ownerless caravan equipped with not-so- covert cameras, mysteriously appeared in Danny Street where my home/our main office was located. Parked to ensure a good view of our front entrance, it was clearly there to film everyone arriving at or leaving our offices. It appeared that MI had deep pockets; a closer investigation revealed that it housed state-of-the-art surveillance equipment.

Several concerned neighbours came to discuss the mysterious caravan with us. The matter was promptly resolved when we had it towed away and dumped in the bush several

kilometres outside the city. We never saw or heard of the caravan again and I doubt the owners ever found it.

An agent in the SAP's Counter Espionage unit reported that he had been given instructions to monitor us and build up a dossier on our alleged criminal activities. His orders had come from the 'political side' and he told us to expect a larger police presence on our tails henceforth. A certain Detective Warrant Officer Diedericks— who apparently had an axe to grind with me—was conducting the investigations. I had never heard of Diedericks. He didn't particularly concern me because he was just one of many people after me so he would have to stand in line—but the SAP also suddenly seemed to have a lot of time and money to waste.

"You don't realise how serious this is," the agent said, "the military have categorised you as a British agent and some media reports have claimed that you're with the CIA. MI is telling everyone that you're smuggling diamonds, weapons, and drugs, and this information is being fed to the government in hope that urgent action will be taken against you. They will use any excuse to shut you down and arrest you."

"They need evidence to arrest me."

"Don't fool yourself. They'll manufacture whatever evidence they need and if necessary, plant it on you or at your house or offices," he said with exasperation. "And you had better watch your back. It's rumoured the military are seriously considering ways to take you out."

I had heard that line before but was not overly concerned about it.

The government's security agencies seemed to think that if they killed me, the men in Angola would pack their bags, and EO would simply collapse. This revealed their complete lack of understanding; no company would shut its doors and terminate its contracts merely because its founder and chairman had died. They were literally out of control and ironically, accusing us of the same.

It was only many years later that an absolutely outrageous document came into my hands via an agent. It was sixteen pages long, undated, and written in Afrikaans by Detective Warrant Officer J Diedericks (number 0425772/3). It showed me precisely what my agent had meant when he'd spoken about evidence being manufactured. It listed supposed EO employees who were involved in criminal activities on the company's behalf as:

- Schalk (possibly Schalkwyk) who is in command of the group.
- Willem Ratte leader of the Pretoria Boere Kommando, a far right-wing grouping that is smuggling weapons and vehicles to and from South Africa.
- Donnie Brown, an ex-32-Battalion member who liaises with Schalk/ Schalkwyk and Ratte.
- Harry Viljoen. A 'good friend' of Schalk/Schalkwyk, Ratte, and Donnie who liaises with them.

None of these men had ever been employed by EO. There was a second list of 'other persons involved in the operation' who 'did the work on the ground':

• George Kiesler, a policeman from Soweto who works in close cooperation with the Chinese Mafia.
• Willie, about whom little is known.
• Bennie van Blerk, a serving member of Special Forces who is an important link in the operation.
• Harry, a coloured man, one of the most important links in the group's illegal activities.

Again, none of these men had any links with EO but that didn't matter; any allegations, lies, or rumours concerning EO and myself were viewed as 'facts'.

Under a paragraph titled 'Activities of the group', Diedericks' 'investigation' had apparently established that EO was about to export stolen vehicles to Angola under the leadership of the named men and their associates. He listed six Nissan Sani 4×4 vehicles (to be sold at R8 000 each), an AMG Mercedes Benz for (our) local use, and a Volkswagen City Golf, also for local use.

In a paragraph headed 'Modus operandi of the group' Diedericks wildly claimed that EO was buying new vehicles in South Africa and taking them to Swaziland where they were apparently handed to criminals who had sought refuge there. Such vehicles were exchanged for Mandrax, marijuana, and cocaine, which, according to him, was brought back to South Africa and sold on the streets. EO also apparently had permission from the Chinese triads[202] to distribute drugs, and in one location alone were said to be supplying 5 000 people. Further, EO was making use of a 'hit man' who drove a BMW M3 and was employed as a bouncer at a sports bar.

Diedericks went on to claim that EO, using funds from drug deals, was engaged in selling two stolen 4 x 4 LDVs to unidentified people in Angola for R30 000 each. These were being flown to Angola by an 'unknown air service' (the implication being that this was Crause Steyl's Capricorn/Ibis Air).

He added that unidentified UN officials were assisting EO in these illegal endeavours and went even further to claim that EO was using 'some of the funds' raised illegally to purchase weapons and other contraband from Angola, specifically including 750g of Red Mercury (an alleged but actually non-existent radioactive substance for use in nuclear weapons) at R3 000 per gram, nine LPD light machine guns (none of us had ever heard of such a weapon[203]) at R 1 000 each, and three cases of dynamite. EO, he stated, had established fifteen weapons caches in northern Namibia and were going to allow their contents to be used in South Africa for 'whatever reason'.

The report noted that EO possessed R6 million worth of diamonds and was able to get as many more as the company needed.

EO was, according to him, also planning to attack a block of flats in Johannesburg (he even gave the name and address) as it was allegedly being used by Nigerians who we intended getting rid of to take over their drug markets. What's more, the organisation was also planning to murder three people in Swaziland who were 'interfering with our

operations'. To achieve this, four limpet mines had been brought in from Angola. Diedericks was unsure who the intended victims were.

"Diedericks seems like a prize prick and an idiot to boot," I said to Nico Palm when I finally got handed his report. With ace detectives such as Diedericks and his ilk working to fabricate intelligence on us, it was not surprising that crime in South Africa was spiralling out of control.

Marginal notations on the document suggested that the SAPS considered it to be a 'very good' and 'factual' investigation. Diedericks may even have been identified as a man with a great future in the SAPS.

It was frustrating to know that there was nothing we could do to counter this garbage. It confirmed my belief that the entire Stratcom operation[204] against myself and EO was being run by people who were afraid we were going to uncover what they were really up to.

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The United Nations' indecisiveness and incompetence continued amidst the unfolding catastrophe in Angola. Knowing full well that if the FAA was eroded the MPLA's negotiating position would be weakened, UNITA began to escalate its actions and orchestrated numerous clashes with the FAA across the country.

Late in April, an agent in Military Intelligence told me that someone had given them aerial photographs of the Saurimo base area along with some explanatory sketches. I had found this strange, but knew from previous reports that MI had been seeking such material, as well as photographs of our men. The agent also said that MI had tasked an agent (identity unknown) to ascertain where EO elements were housed.

To my considerable anguish and regret I didn't fully comprehend the significance of this. I was far from naive—I knew that MI would be running agents in my organisation, but foolishly believed that this was an advantage. They would be well positioned to discount much of the disinformation that MI were giving to the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), SAP, DFA, and National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC). I was soon to be proved very wrong.

Then another disinformation operation (driven from South Africa) began to surface. Data fed into our intelligence systems suggested that UNITA had either purchased or been given a South African-designed and built G6 155mm self-propelled howitzer, and that it was positioned close enough for them to be able to shell Saurimo. The G6 had a 50 kilometre range so it could have been located anywhere within that radius. It was also suggested that the gun had been provided complete with a South African gun crew. Knowing and understanding the deployment of artillery we realised this was a lie but we couldn't simply ignore the information. I passed it on to Carl and told him it was suspect. He had already heard the story about the G6, identified the source of the data, and taken the necessary counter-actions. I didn't ask him what those had been; he knew what to do.

The presence of this false intelligence gave Duncan and Carl an opportunity to learn which of our men were willing to lend their ears to rumours, and these were immediately

withdrawn from Saurimo. We realised this had been a serious attempt to create concern and uncertainty, and to demoralise the men on the ground. Apart from having made us waste a few days proving the story to be false, the G6 disinformation operation had not been very successful, and didn't stop the advance on Cafunfu.

UNITA, MI, and Sean Cleary would have to try something else, and they did.

Johann Smith told me that Sean Cleary (in his capacity now, as an 'advisor' to both President Mandela and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki) had been working hard behind the scenes since President Mandela's inauguration on 10 May 1994. In a move intended to humiliate President dos Santos of the MPLA and show that the ANC-dominated government supported UNITA, Dr Savimbi was invited to South Africa to meet both Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. Several photo sessions were arranged during which Savimbi happily posed alongside President Mandela and Deputy President Mbeki. He also gave several media interviews which, not surprisingly, were lapped up by the media. In these interviews Savimbi claimed that the war-weary Angolans deserved peace under a UNITA government. He was quick to accuse the MPLA of fuelling the war but behind the smiling façade, he was the one planning for war.

The MPLA were understandably furious.

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As was customary, Lafras, Nico and I flew to Cabo Ledo for our weekly coordinating conference on 19 May. I chaired the meetings with Lafras as my alternative and our senior personnel drove or flew in from outlying base areas like Rio Longa and Saurimo to provide their input. The EO men who were part of Battle Group Alpha remained in place and would later receive feedback on the meeting via encrypted radio channels.

We covered matters such as EO's personnel issues, intelligence, operations and training, logistical matters, finance, and medical issues. Nic van den Bergh shared the FAA General Staff's plans, intentions, and concerns and gave his views on them. We also, time permitting, visited whatever outlying EO bases we could, and got first- hand feedback on progress and problems. At the end of the visits, we would fly back to South Africa and our men would return to their base areas and continue their tasks.

The RDF at Saurimo was under strength as some of its members had been seconded to the EO combat team advancing with Battle Group Alpha. The remainder were either on leave or had been kept behind by Duncan for limited area operations or to act as a reserve or rapid reaction force if needed by Roelf. They were also to act as S & R for any downed EO aircraft.

At the meeting some concerns were raised about Saurimo having been stripped of the key RDF elements being used to reinforce 16 Brigade's advance, but according to Duncan and Carl, the situation in the area was stable and UNITA posed no immediate threat. Although under strength there, the men felt secure within the garrison perimeter. They sensed no need for immediate reinforcements, and were spending their time monitoring the advance of Roelf's combat team, resolving any logistical problems Nevis' Battle

Group Alpha was encountering, and scrambling the PC-7s to strike targets or deliver close-air support.

Late that night, long after Duncan and Carl had returned from the Cabo Ledo meeting, an indirect fire-support group of a UNITA penetration team set up their mortars close to Saurimo's garrison perimeter and along the airfield's southern perimeter. If the FAA sentries had been doing their tasks properly, it would have been impossible for UNITA to achieve this deployment.

With their indirect fire support in place, a UNITA penetration team of between 40 and 50 men wearing FAA combat uniforms and South African webbing walked, unchallenged, through FAA's outer perimeter, waving at the sentries as they did so. They knew exactly where they were going and walked directly to the area where the remnants of EO's rapid reaction force and the pilots were barracked.

"You whites must all come outside. We won't shoot you," they called out in English. The realisation that UNITA had infiltrated the area was greeted with stunned shock.

The first to recover was Blackie Swart. He immediately opened fire, but he was soon cut down by the enemy. His fast reaction spurred the rest of the men into action.

Having lost the element of surprise, UNITA turned and ran in the direction of one of the Mi-17s, spraying it with ball and tracer rounds and RPG-7 rockets as they went. The helicopter exploded into a ball of flame, lighting up the darkness. By then, the power generator had already been destroyed in the attack. They also fired on the air crew's sleeping quarters, and then turned back to launch an almost platoon- strength assault on the area where the EO command element was housed. UNITA obviously knew the exact layout of Saurimo and attacked only the EO positions and not those of the FAA.

One of the defenders described events:

One chopper had already been shot out and was burning like crazy. We were able to identify their positions by the muzzle flashes of their weapons and by their silhouettes against the backdrop of the burning chopper. The whole area was swathed in darkness and it was chaos as we opened fire at whatever we construed as a target. It was difficult because we didn't want to hit the FAA recruits or our own men. Our tracers crisscrossed with theirs and they were stonking us with 60mm and 82mm mortars. It was all a little scary. They knew exactly where we were and had obviously planned their attack in detail. They also fired at the second chopper with small arms and RPG-7s. There were isolated firefights all around us as the guys opened up at UNITA and they retaliated with fire. Although they took us by complete surprise, Blackie saved our arses. We knew he had gone down but someone dragged him to cover while the rest of us fired madly. Everyone joined in the punch-up, even the pilots who at one time seemed to have been cut off from the rest of us. The attack seemed to last for hours. During the whole time, there was no sign of FAA, nor did they engage UNITA. That was probably a good thing as we might have been caught in the cross-fire between the FAA and UNITA.

It took the FAA about 40 minutes to mount a reaction of sorts. Their BMP-2s sped past our men's positions, pursued by UNITA fire. The EO men ceased firing in case the FAA

gunners panicked and turned their 30mm guns on them instead. While chaos reigned, UNITA took the chance to slip into the bush and make their getaway. Realising that UNITA were either withdrawing or preparing for another assault, Duncan called a ceasefire to assess casualties and damage.

The charred remains of an EO helicopter after the UNITA penetration night attack at Saurimo

Miraculously Blackie was the only serious casualty. Under torch light, the doctor worked desperately to stabilise him. Duncan set about consolidating the defensive position and despatched Piet van der Riet (the King Air pilot) and a protection element to conduct a pre-flight check so that Blackie could be medevaced to a hospital in South Africa as soon as possible. Miraculously, the King Air had not been damaged and was soon on its way with a seriously wounded Blackie.

Sonny Janeke gave his account of the UNITA attack to me as follows:

I recall UNITA starting their attack with the mortars. The full moon had just gone down when the shit started. One of them fired a rocket—it sounded like it had come from an M-72 disposable rocket launcher—into one of the Mi-17s.[205] The rocket hit the gearbox which lit up the area like a giant welding torch, and we could see UNITA running towards their targets. I actually saw one of them run across to the generator and fire at it with his AK-47. Many shots later, the generator died and we lost our lights but the chopper was still flooding the area with light.

At some stage during the punch-up, one of the Special Forces guys came running across to us with an RPG-7 and fired two or three rockets in the direction of what he thought were the UNITA mortar positions. It was very chaotic, confusing, and dangerous; we didn't know who was who so it became difficult to judge who to shoot at. Before UNITA's attack, Piet and a co-pilot had landed the King Air. It was the co-pilot's first time at Saurimo. After Piet took off with Blackie, we never saw the new guy again.

The FAA finally got their BMP-2s into formation and commenced with mechanised patrols in the area till around daybreak when a final assessment of the damage could be

done. Early that morning, the FAA's General Sukissa and Duncan met to inspect the damage. The general complimented Duncan and Carl on how our men had reacted and the manner in which they had conducted themselves during the attack.

Our communications centre in Centurion near Pretoria had already been made aware of the attack and its aftermath, and had immediately contacted Olivedale Clinic. An ambulance was despatched to the airport to await Blackie's arrival. Despite the outstanding efforts by the doctor and medical teams at Olivedale, Blackie died shortly afterwards. He would never know that his quick-thinking had saved the lives of many of his friends.

At first light, a massive follow-up operation was mounted, with the intention of running the UNITA penetration team to ground. Although UNITA had suffered only three killed in the night, the follow-up team found fifteen more bodies. They had apparently been wounded and UNITA, unable to carry them, had executed them on the spot rather than letting them fall into our hands. The callousness with which they had treated their wounded gave us some insight into how desperate they were.

UNITA left behind a lot of equipment (including a new German-made Carl Gustav anti-tank rocket launcher) in their flight that morning. The follow-up group also found the body of a woman they had callously murdered at a river they had crossed during their hasty retreat.

A UNITA rebel killed during the attack on Saurimo, May 1994

Deeply saddened at Blackie's death, we knew that UNITA's attack on Saurimo had been aimed at our leadership group and pilots. They had failed in their attempt and we would make them live to regret it.

It was with a lot of anger that I recalled MI having been in possession of photos and drawings of our area at Saurimo. I could only assume that MI had passed this information to UNITA, and that was unforgivable. Only MI knew what game they were playing and they weren't about to tell.

We also lost our valuable helicopters but we were fortunate not to have suffered more casualties and greater damage. Providentially, the PC-7s had been undergoing routine maintenance in Luanda at the time so we still had an offensive air weapon at our disposal.

The fallout from the penetration attack would be felt for some time. Unbeknown to General De Matos, the local political commissar started looking for a scapegoat, and in his lack of wisdom, he turned on Executive Outcomes as a result of which, several additional MPLA commissars flew in to Saurimo and tried to interrogate our men. General Sukissa's angry and violent intervention put a halt to this farce. He told the commissars in no uncertain terms that EO (and not the FAA) had repelled the attack. The commissars were sent packing back to Luanda.

Oddly enough, only one journalist phoned me to ask about the attack. To the best of my knowledge, not a single newspaper reported it.

Some of the men at Saurimo promptly asked to be transferred somewhere safe. It seemed they were unable to live up to their own war stories and wanted out of the company as soon as possible. Some of them used the excuse that the promises made to them when they had joined the company (including those made by the FAA) had not materialised.

Duncan quite correctly refused to transfer them to more cushy jobs and they were given the option of resigning or being summarily dismissed. Nic van den Bergh sanctioned Duncan's decisions, as did we in Pretoria. A Boeing 727 was despatched from Pretoria to collect these hangers-on. We didn't need to babysit those who allowed fear to get the better of them.

The men who remained behind were more determined than ever to see their contract through. They promptly stopped relying on the FAA's sentry system and started their own. There also appeared to be a change in their attitude towards UNITA—they wanted to be more involved in the war and several asked to be sent to join Battle Group Alpha. Saurimo's EO contingent now wanted to take the fight to UNITA wherever they might be.

The men who opted to return to South Africa were a feast for MI as several of them volunteered to be debriefed in exchange for cash. Judging from some of the feedback I got from my MI agents, these men must have been operating in a different country to their EO colleagues. Their stories were totally off the mark and at times even pathetically funny, but we didn't find much humour in their tale-telling. MI were, however, jubilant about their little coup.

The subsequent MI reports were fed to the NICOC as 'top secret facts' as a result of which, EO faced even more condemnation. One agent said that as a result of the slanted reporting, MI had concluded that EO—and certainly not UNITA—was the destabilising factor in Angola and an obstacle to peace. It wouldn't take long for the debriefing 'intelligence' to find its way back to UNITA either, presumably with more encouragement to attack us.

I later learnt that the daring night-attack had been carried out by Savimbi's Groupos de Bate, a UNITA Special detachment. It had been obvious from the start that the attack was not carried out by run-of-the-mill UNITA troops.

A UNITA prisoner being escorted to the interrogation room after having been captured after the attack on Saurimo

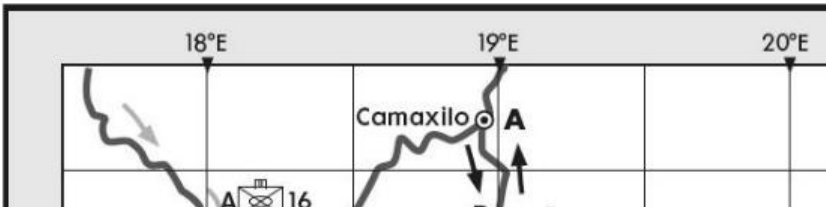
A few days later the destroyed helicopters were replaced by two very badly maintained and dirty FAA Mi-17s. According to Carl Alberts, the machines were in a disgusting state and it was a miracle that they were even able to get airborne. The FAA pilots flying these rattle-traps also came with an attitude that left a lot to be desired. An agreement was reached, however, that FAA pilots would fly FAA missions and EO pilots would fly EO missions.

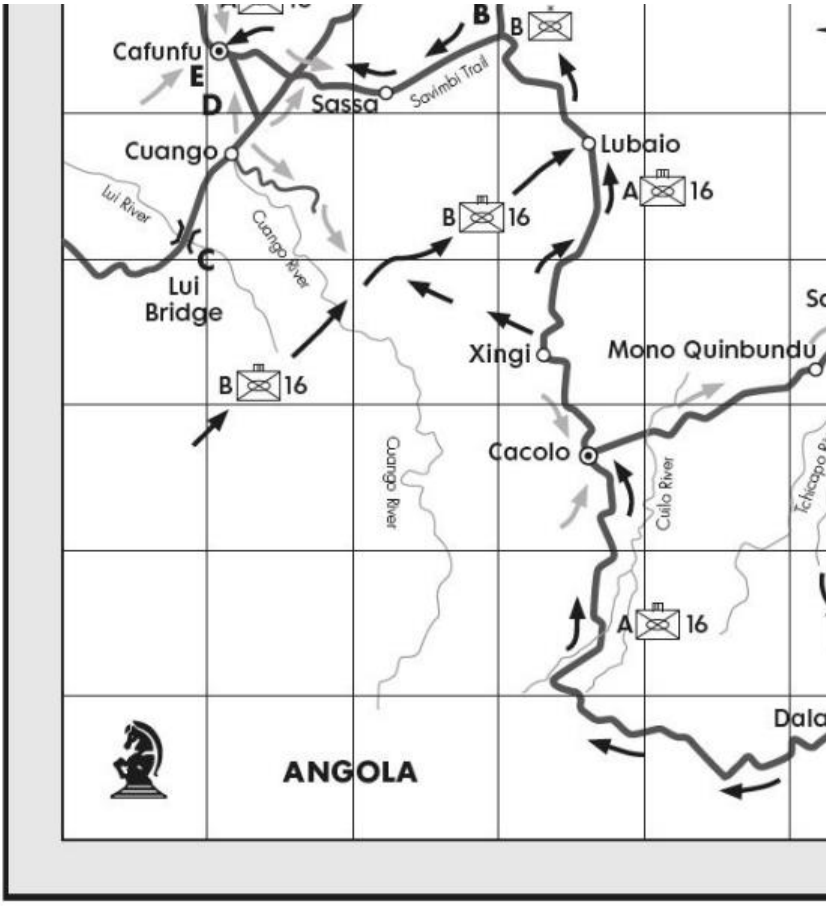
On 26 May, our PC-7s arrived back at Saurimo after their maintenance cycle had been completed in Luanda. By then our fighter pilots, commanded by Colonel Pine Pienaar, had completed their MiG-23[206] conversion and orientation flights. By mid-June their MiG-23s were conducting regular air raids on Cafunfu and environs. Their mission was to strike targets, soften up UNITA defensive positions, and prevent UNITA reinforcements from entering the area. A by-product of these raids was the demoralisation of UNITA's defenders.

With the arrival of the two replacement Mi-17s, Saurimo was again ready to enter the fray.

Duncan and Carl had decided to show UNITA that there was still a lot of fight left in EO, even if they were seriously outnumbered. Lafras and Nic approved their plans, as I would have had I been aware of them.

Lubalo—a town that lay to the north of Battle Group Alpha's advance route and approximately 120 kilometres north of the strategic UNITA town of Cacolo—was selected as a target and the planning swung into gear.





Battle Group A (16 Brigade) Axis of Advance - Saurimo t

- Advance route of 16 Brigade's combat teams
- Enemy deployments and movements

A - Stand-off attack 02/04/1994

B - Ambush 06/07/1994

C - Louwrens Bosch bombs the Lui Bridge

D - Capture of Cafunfu on 15/07/1994

E - Juba Joubert's helicopter shot down by SAM-7 on 28/07/1994

D-day was set for late May/early June.

Since Lubalo was protected by the UNITA garrison at Cacolo, Duncan appreciated that a heliborne assault would be sure to catch them by surprise. The day selected was a Sunday. With the tropical thunderstorm season approaching, it was hoped that the sound of thunder would mask the approach of the Mi-17s. It was also appreciated that UNITA would not be able to react in time as the plan relied entirely on speed, surprise, the weather, and precise coordination.

Duncan opted for a quick infiltration by helicopter, a stand-off mortar bombardment on the town, and a quick extraction back to Saurimo. It would be a typical hit-and-run operation of the type that had yielded good results in the past.

Once again, the mortar and protection teams went out to rehearse drills, zero rifles, range mortars, and confirm their modus operandi. The men were keen to get back into action. They intended to avenge Blackie's death and send a very strong signal to UNITA: Stay away from Saurimo.

By early afternoon on D-day, Duncan's men were ready to take Lubalo by surprise. Laden with weapons, ammunition, and mortar bombs, the teams staggered to the two Mi-17s which lifted off, escorted by two PC-7s, one acting as close air support and the other as a Telstar.

Flying through thunderstorms, the teams were inserted about 2 000 meters from their objective. Mortar base plates were rapidly positioned, tubes laid, and the first 82mm bombs fired to confirm range. With their bearings and distances safely stored on GPS, the mortar teams made minor adjustments to range, charge, and elevation. When the Telstar had given corrections, they fired for effect. Caught by surprise, UNITA responded with blind small-arms fire which had no influence on the mortar teams or their protection.

Lubalo was hit by more than 80 bombs in less than two minutes, causing massive casualties. The Mi-17s were already en route to the extraction LZs as the last bombs were leaving their tubes.

While the men were being uplifted and helicoptered out, the armed PC-7 spotted UNITA troop movement in the town and swooped down, unleashing its deadly rockets and creating even more havoc. On the way to Saurimo, the Telstar spotted four military vehicles concealed in a village and radioed the position to the helicopters. The Mi-17s hastily turned back to investigate but were driven away by intense ground fire. This information was relayed to the Telstar who in tum instructed the armed PC-7 to empty its remaining rockets into the vehicles. After hitting the UNITA men with a storm of rockets, it was time to go home.

EO Mi-17 returning to Saurimo with an assault team after the mortar strike on Lubalo (photo: unknown)

The ground and air action effectively destroyed Lubalo as a stronghold, and Battle Group Alpha would meet little or no resistance along this leg of the advance. A UNITA radio message was intercepted: 'Barro's troops and all my wounded people will remain behind at this position. We are awaiting the trucks so we can start moving.' Several days later an MI agent told me that UNITA had suffered serious casualties that Sunday afternoon. I was surprised that MI had received this information so quickly but it was gratifying to learn that at least 58 UNITA troops had been killed and many more wounded.

I also recalled a pep talk that I had given our men what felt like a long time before: "If they kill one of our men, let's go out and kill a hundred of theirs."

UNITA never attacked Saurimo again.

17:
Prelude to Cafunfu

Saurimo settled into an uneasy peace after the UNITA attack. The EO combat team attached to 16 Brigade's Battle Group Alpha needed a new commander (Roelf van Heerden had promised his wife that he would be at her side when their baby was born) and Nic van den Bergh thought Hennie Blaauw would be the perfect choice. Grumpy and frustrated about having to train FAA recruits at Rio Longa while others got to be in the thick of the action, Hennie could not have been happier to hear this. He sent me a radio message expressing his joy and thanking me even though I'd had nothing to do with the decision to redeploy him. Nic also asked him to take temporary command of Saurimo while Duncan took some well-deserved leave.

Meanwhile, the UN's UNAVEM II mission continued to make it patently obvious that some of the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council had no desire for the war to end.

An undated report stated:

> In its resolution 922 of 31 May 1994, the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of UNAVEM II until 30 June 1994, and stressed that its future decision concerning Angola would take into account the extent to which the parties demonstrated their political will to achieve a lasting peace. It encouraged both parties to finalise outstanding details in the peace process without further procrastination.

Hennie arrived at Saurimo on 1 June and immediately began familiarising himself with the situation on the ground using all the intelligence at his disposal.

Nic had already briefed Hennie on Battle Group Alpha's advance and explained the deviation that had become necessary due to UNITA having demolished the Alto Cuilo bridge. Studying the maps and intelligence reports, and monitoring the battle group's radio net, Hennie was able to build up a sufficiently detailed picture to enable him to make whatever decisions were necessary once he assumed command.

As soon as Duncan returned from leave, Hennie accompanied a routine Mi- 17 supply run to the laager area[207] temporarily being occupied by Roelf. The battle group's vehicles were deployed in all-round defence so as to be able to react immediately in case of UNITA interference. The Mi-17s came into the LZ which was marked with smoke, off-loaded their cargo, and took off to orbit out of range of possible enemy small arms and mortar fire while they waited for orders from the ground commanders. Roelf greeted Hennie with a huge grin, gave him his maps, and told him that his second-in-command would brief him but the advance was going according to schedule. He then formally handed over command and, after a quick handshake, clambered into the Mi-17 that had dropped down to uplift him and thundered off to Saurimo.

Jos Grobler, an ex-Koevoet operator and now Hennie's second-in-command, briefed him on the unfolding situation regarding UNITA and the problems the battle group was

experiencing. Jos then introduced him to Colonel Nevis (the Soviet- trained mechanised infantry officer commanding Battle Group Alpha and one of the FAA combat teams) and Captain Mondoreal, an aggressive young FAA combat team commander.

Hennie was impressed with his own combat team. They had come from diverse military backgrounds (32 Battalion, Koevoet, the paras, and Special Forces) but he could immediately see that Roelf had welded them into a fine, cohesive fighting unit. They showed pride in their equipment and their abilities, morale was very high, and they were keen to get back into action.

An EO BMP crew take a break during the advance on Cafunfu

Nevis assigned the EO combat team to protect the unit's rear echelons. This entailed recovering stuck or damaged vehicles, protecting the logistical vehicles, and eating dust from the forward elements. They would also act as a mobile reserve if required by Nevis. Hennie was not pleased with this arrangement as his combat team would probably miss most of the action. He wanted to lead the advance, up where the action was sure to be. He would later recall:

Flying re-supply mission after re-supply mission, our pilots were keen to make sure that we had everything we needed. Apart from this, everyone knew that a casevac was literally only minutes away, so if anyone got wounded our pilots would fly in to take them to a hospital. Knowing that the company was willing to ensure the best medical treatment at a private hospital in South Africa was great for morale and the guys were keen to show their metal in action.

Jos then briefed me on the route and progress to date and also indicated our anticipated route. He was one of those super-positive guys and he had the fullest confidence in our men.

He then introduced me to my BMP command vehicle and its crew. They all oozed with confidence.

I couldn't wait for the advance to start. I was in my element.

Hennie didn't favour the Soviet BMP-2,[208] which he regarded as an inferior infantry fighting vehicle. He much preferred the bulky South African-built Ratel[209] — but he would soon change his mind.

Ploughing through thick bush and open savannah, the battle group headed for Alto Chicapa, about 120 kilometres away. Itching for action, the EO team now

The BMP-2 proved itself to be a formidable IFV in the battle against UNITA (photo: Mynhard Heroldt)

followed at the rear, choking in the dust and sweating in the heat. In their laager areas each night, Jos and Hennie made sure they carried out daily maintenance checks on the BMPs and that all equipment remained battle-ready.

Colonel Nevis didn't make his FAA teams follow EO's example in this respect. When the men cautioned him that the lack of daily maintenance could lead to breakdowns their advice fell on deaf ears as a result of which, several BMP-2s later broke down due to lack of basic maintenance—losses the battle group could ill afford.

As the column cut its way through the Angolan bush, it entered areas that, for years, the FAA had avoided due to them having been under UNITA control. UNITA had long been running operations aimed at capturing the hearts and minds of the locals—or dominating them with terror. They had been partially successful in some of these endeavours. Their domination of the povo had provided them with a pool of recruits to draw from and intelligence feedback on any suspicious activity.

The local population looked on with a mixture of fear and relief as Battle Group Alpha moved through their areas. Despite the EO men protesting loudly (and Oom Hennie at times doing so violently) the FAA troops followed Colonel Nevis' orders to torch villages in which the inhabitants were considered pro-UNITA and therefore dangerous. This outrageous conduct endorsed and entrenched the anti-government sentiments that UNITA preached and made those who did not support UNITA change their minds.

The scorched-earth policy implemented by Nevis denied the unit valuable intelligence the locals might have been willing to provide had they been treated well and left to get on with their lives. It also allowed UNITA to plot the battle group's rate of advance by following the smoke plumes from burning villages. The column also had to cross many

rivers and other natural obstacles as a result of which, UNITA was able to target it with fairly accurate mortar fire on several occasions.

The advance route taken by the battle group was not one that UNITA had anticipated, so resistance was often sporadic and feeble, and the UNITA troops that were encountered were mainly from enemy logistical units. Despite the resistance being weak it still caused delays, and Hennie continued to badger Nevis about the unnecessary and undesirable halts to torch villages. Nevis finally caved in and agreed to stop this practise.

Battle Group Alpha now continued its advance without signalling its position to UNITA. On 10 June it was finally forced to call a halt near Cacolo as one of Nevis' BMP-2s had thrown a track. The following day, 11 June 1994, an FAA Special Forces company attacked the UNITA positions at Cacolo. On hearing the sounds of a furious firefight raging in the town, Nevis and Hennie held a quick planning session and decided to support the Special Forces attack.

Their plan was simple: The EO combat team would attack and hold the airfield. They would then position stopper groups and cut off retreating UNITA troops or vehicles. If needed, they would also act as a mobile reserve for Nevis' forces. In the meantime, Nevis would drive straight into Cacolo with Captain Mondoreal acting as his mobile reserve. Once they had rolled up resistance, Battle Group Alpha would consolidate north of Cacolo, link up with Battle Group Bravo as planned, and continue with the advance on Cafunfu.

Brushing aside UNITA resistance, Hennie's combat team had soon seized and consolidated their positions, and controlled the airfield. They established a tactical HQ at the end of the airstrip and strengthened their defensive position in case it was needed for resupply or casevac.

EO men preparing for the first capture of Cacolo. FAA had already moved to the start line

Nevis and Mondoreal's combat teams plunged into Cacolo to support the FAA Special Forces. Intense fighting filled the air and UNITA resistance withered away under their fire. Cacolo fell soon thereafter. The Special Forces had done themselves proud and our men were pleased to note that their training had been put to good use.

I arrived at Cacolo shortly after it had been captured. Oom Hennie promptly ordered a small parade in my honour and I was able to address the men. They were keen to learn about the prevailing situation regarding EO in South Africa and I told them our problems

seemed to be fading. Admitting that we were still being targeted would not have been good for morale. Before I left, Oom Hennie, on behalf of himself and the men, presented me with a Kershaw Trooper combat knife engraved 'Ops Group Angola to Eeben Barlow'.[210]

Author takes a salute to honour and address his men after the recapture of Cacolo, Angola

The next morning, Nevis turned his attention to recovering two of the BMP-2s he had lost through poor maintenance. In the recovery process, a third was lost when it detonated an anti-tank mine, leaving him with only nine BMPs with which to continue the advance. Fortuitously, the EO combat team had not lost any of its IFVs in the advance. It was also fortunate that no one had been killed in the mine blast—the BMP-2 is not known for its mine-resistance capabilities.

Hennie told me later:

We were tasked to stay at Cacolo until Brigadier Pepe arrived with the rest of 16 Brigade. I wanted to consolidate our positions and stabilise the area with aggressive fighting patrols as soon as possible. This would allow us a greater depth to our defensive positions and let UNITA know that we weren't there on holiday. Having lost three BMPs, Nevis asked if I could help out with two BMP- 2s and crews as he wanted to despatch a fighting patrol to Muhango. I complied thinking that it would be a good idea to mop up the area.

My detached BMPs were placed under the command of Captain Mondoreal, a good officer although he tended to be hot-headed and reckless at times.

On 14 June they hit a contact in Muhango and rapidly overpowered UNITA with fire. Those not immediately killed fled into the bush, after which Mondoreal quickly swept the town for more enemy troops. We were sent a report that said only four UNITA troops had been killed in the firefight. They had been armed only with AK- 47s and seemed malnourished and in poor physical condition. I was relieved to learn that they didn't possess any shoulder-launched anti-tank weapons.

As the bridge at Alto Cuilo had been destroyed by UNITA, we were forced to halt the advance and wait for 16 Brigade's Battle Group Bravo to arrive with the TMMs (Russian

mobile bridge-layers), span the river, develop a bridgehead, and consolidate before we could continue.

As UNITA withdrew from Cacolo, several civilians were executed and their bodies were left lying on the road

Waiting at Cacolo for Battle Group Bravo to link up with them, Battle Group Alpha spent its time consolidating positions, repairing and maintaining vehicles and equipment under the watchful eye of Jos Grobler, and generally trying to rest up before the final advance and approach on Cafunfu.

In order to prevent any UNITA attacks on their positions, Hennie deployed the BM-21s[211] (Russian wheeled 122mm multiple-rocket launcher) for early morning and late afternoon rocket strikes on potential UNITA assembly areas and start lines. UNITA stayed away.

Although the locals in the area had long been under the iron hand of UNITA control, Hennie and his men quickly set about trying to coax them back to Cacolo.

A small clinic was set up to treat the locals that had been caught in cross-fire or were suffering from malaria or dysentery, and relations between the povo and the battle group personnel improved. Small markets soon sprang up again as the displaced locals ventured back to the town. Hennie and his men realised that this would allow the povo to venture closer to their positions and possibly report back to UNITA, nevertheless, they continued with their own hearts-and-minds policy, trying to bring a semblance of normality back into the lives of people who for years had known little but war, hardship, fear, and propaganda.

With several men returning from leave in South Africa, Hennie was also waiting for reinforcements to arrive and bolster his combat team.

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A BM-21 122mm MRL
being readied for action (photo: H Blaauw)

On 21 June, FAA Deputy Chief of Staff General McKenzie, Chief of Special Forces General Antonio Faćeira, 16 Brigade's commander Brigadier Pepe de Castro along with part of his HQ group, Lafras, Duncan, and Carl flew into Cacolo by helicopter for a planning session with Battle Group Alpha's commander and officers.

Also en route were Mike Herbst and some FAA and EO instructors with a mission to train a home guard unit to defend Cacolo against any UNITA attempts to retake it.

At the joint FAA-EO tactical HQ, General Antonio Faćeira (supported by the combat team commanders who had been engaged in action along the advance route and input from the intelligence officers) discussed the planned approach and assault on Cafunfu in detail. His plan would rely on deception.

Hennie later recalled:

As you know, terrain dictates tactics. In many ways UNITA held the advantage because we had to deal with obstacles like rivers, deep ravines, streams, and dense bush. There was only one usable road, so it was virtually impossible for us to advance over a wide front. We were restricted in our axis of advance. They also knew the area far better than we did as they had been there for years.

Another embuggerance factor was that we had a limited tactical air capability so we could not rely on air support. At the very best, we hoped UNITA would see our advance as the force's main axis. If we could convince them of that, De Castro's Battle Group Bravo could hopefully move undetected to Lubalo along a disused Portuguese road from Cacolo.

Of course it was a calculated risk, but then we also hoped to have an element of deception in our plan. If we could keep UNITA confused, thinking and guessing, they might not discover our true intentions.

Specific tasks and timings were allocated at the planning cycle and the men left knowing that they were all playing an important role in the plan to capture Cafunfu, without which, UNITA would no longer have the diamonds that were funding its efforts. I also realised that the fall of Cafunfu would generate new allegations about EO and myself.

My Strategic Intelligence Summary of 21 June reported:

It appears that UNITA has activated its main operational base at Cafunfu which is being used to coordinate all their military actions. Because of this, a large military presence is visible on the ground. The airfield, which UNITA considers to be of vital strategic importance, is relatively well protected by anti-aircraft weapon systems.

The main anti-aircraft weapon systems in use are:

- ZSU-23-4s on both approaches to the runway.
- Four 14.5mm positions east of the runway.
- Elements equipped with SAM-7 or SA-16 missiles.

A well-developed trench and bunker network surrounds the airfield. A total of four T-55 tanks and two x BTR-60PB were observed in hull-down positions to the north and south of the airfield.

A large communications centre with various antennas and radio masts is situated to the east of the runway.

Comment:

In the event of a pending attack on Cafunfu, it is appreciated that UNITA will not resist with a strong defensive battle. Instead, it will withdraw critical equipment and then attempt to surround Cafunfu. In such an event, UNITA indirect weapons will be used to demoralise and create casualties mainly by indirect fire. Direct interference is highly unlikely.

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The allegations made by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Military Intelligence, their special friends, and the media regarding EO's involvement with the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi continued to gather momentum. So too did allegations that EO was engaged in criminal activities. It was very obvious that concern about the possibility of Cafunfu falling was making MI, DFA, and their cohorts nervous. They needed to distract us from Angola, hide South Africa's involvement in Rwanda and Burundi, and make the Angolan government doubt both our intentions and integrity.

I refuted the allegations and called on the press (who claimed they were getting their information from 'undisclosed sources within the DFA and MI') to provide evidence. I told one reporter on the phone either to prove our alleged involvement in Rwanda and Burundi or go and fuck himself.

A female journalist calling from Toronto was horrified when I told her that I was recording our conversation so that I could check if she quoted me correctly. She told me that it was illegal to record conversations without the consent of both parties. I told her that I was not subject to Canadian law. To my knowledge, she never wrote her 'scoop' which told me a lot anyway.

I was astonished at the lengths some female journalists were willing to go to for a supposed 'scoop' on EO. I was frequently offered a 'warm bed and more' in exchange for

a ‘good story’.

The media continued to smear EO and represent us as the ‘bad guys’ while portraying the South African government as ‘peacemakers’. Considering the aid and assistance Angola had given the ANC during its years in exile, it was deeply ironic that this continued stream of disinformation had continued under the new ANC- led government. I understood that the ANC had inherited structures that were still dominated by pro-UNITA National Party appointees who had merely continued their political game-playing and mis-advised those in government who didn’t know or understand the strategy relating to Angola and UNITA. Nevertheless, the onus was with government to confirm the validity of their so-called intelligence on the Angolans. They never did.

D-Day for the assault on Cafunfu was set for 6 July 1994. We all knew that if UNITA lost Cafunfu, they would lose the war. Meanwhile, UNITA rushed men and supplies into the area in preparation for 16 Brigade’s advance and pending assault. Air interdiction by the MiGs and PC-7s frequently disrupted these attempts and caused huge casualties and loss of materiel.

Lafras briefed me on an aspect that was of concern to him: because the bridge spanning the Alto Cuilo had been damaged, it was possible that 16 Brigade’s Battle Group Bravo would be compelled to deviate from their advance and swing north to cross at Lubalo. However, it had also been predicted that, since Duncan’s successful surprise attack on Lubalo, UNITA would be more cautious in engaging the advancing battle group and we concluded that going through Lubalo would be a calculated risk.

Carl Dietz’s intelligence network was now starting to report on UNITA atrocities in the path of 16 Brigade’s advance. Whether these were intended to intimidate the local population or pin atrocities to the Brigade we never knew. What Carl did know was that the povo, fearing for their well being and lives, were leaving the areas along the route of advance.

Without UNITA realising it, their ‘fear-through-atrocities’ tactic would play to our advantage as the povo would eventually turn to us for help.

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On 23 June, I submitted a Strategic Intelligence Summary to Nic van den Bergh:

UNITA’s main logistical effort is currently being controlled out of Zaire, namely Kinshasa, Kamina Air Base and Mbuji-Mayi. The aircraft in use include AN-12s, C-130s, Electras, AN-32s, and Islanders.

Zaire has given UNITA permission and extended assistance to expand the logistical routes by road convoys. Large quantities of artillery shells and dieseline are being routed from Zaire. The following logistical routes are in use:

- From Kinshasa to Matadi/Boma, Sumba and Soyo;
- From Kinshasa to Matadi/Boma and then to the Mbaza Congo area;
- From Kinshasa to Kimvula south to Quimbele;

- From Kinshasa to Kenge then south to Popokabaka and on to Kasondo;
- From Kinshasa to Kikwit, Kahemba and south to Cuango/Cafunfu.

Comments:

The vehicle convoys usually only operate at night to make maximum use of the cover of darkness. Some problems are being experienced with the theft of supplies by the local population.

On 24 June, I warned Carl Dietz that UNITA were planning an assault on Cacolo and tasked him to advise Mike Herbst and his men to expect a large-scale UNITA attack on their positions there. An MI agent had told me it would probably be an infiltration night attack 'with some advice from the Directorate of Special Tasks (DST)'. UNITA's South African sympathisers were keen to assist them in stopping us or creating casualties within the company.

While leading a mobile combat patrol to Muachimba, about fifteen to twenty kilometres distant from Colonel Nevis' Battle Group Alpha, Hennie's team discovered fresh enemy tracks. Deciding to investigate an apparent UNITA presence, they swung off the road to check out a small village in the area. Here they were greeted by the grisly sight of twelve bodies lying in the road.

In a nearby hut were the charred remains of 23 children.

The locals told them that UNITA had executed the men on the road and burnt the children alive in the hut two days before. How many more villages had suffered the same fate, no one knew, and we could only speculate about motivations. The povo however were adamant that the atrocities had been committed because they had not wanted to join UNITA in fighting the approaching 16 Brigade.

By now, the povo were arriving at Cacolo in ever-increasing numbers, desperately looking for aid and assistance from our men. As Hennie made his way back to Cacolo from Muachimba, Mike Herbst radioed him and told him that an additional 1 500 povo had arrived at Cacolo. With more than 5 000 desperately hungry and injured villagers to contend with, Mike and his men gave whatever aid and support they could but with an ever worsening food and medical situation, there was only so much they could do. Hennie contacted Duncan and asked for emergency relief to be sent to Cacolo immediately. Meanwhile, EO medics tried to assist the injured, wounded, and malnourished wherever they could, despite being short of supplies.

On the suggestion of Dr Francis Smit, we sent men to beg or buy whatever expired medicines were available before they were routinely destroyed from hospitals in the Pretoria area.

The hospitals responded positively. With literally tons of medicines to hand, we arranged for an aircraft to fly them to Angola for distribution to the areas most affected by the fighting, and Duncan was able to radio Hennie to inform him that a logistics convoy with relief supplies would be accompanying Bravo's advance. While Hennie was relieved (the locals were draining his meagre supplies) the locals were ecstatic when they heard the news.

Trying to relieve the misery of the locals in Angola did not give us any financial advantage, nor was it part of our contract, but some journalists now hinted that we were smuggling medical supplies from South Africa. Others alleged that we had stolen the medicines and were selling them on the black-market. Journalistic integrity was in very short supply.

By late-June, the SAPS visited me and interrogated me about our 'medicine smuggling activities'. According to the investigating officers (I cannot recall their names) the intelligence regarding this latest EO crime had come from MI, and the 'media' had also confirmed the claim. When they heard what we were really doing with the medicines and why, they asked how they could assist us.

UNITA were also trying to concentrate some of their forces at Muachimba. An SU-22 strike aircraft on a combat air patrol spotted a concentration of UNITA troops several kilometres to the north of Muachimba and strafed the area with canon- fire. Although the mission results were never known, a radio intercept gave some indication of its impact:

Tx: Baluarte Rx: Bosao

Situation is not good. I was just bit scared of the enemy jet fighter that was flying all over my area. It shoots many men and the situation is not relaxed. We sleep little.

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Brigadier Pepe de Castro's columns, comprising Battle Group Bravo and the remainder of 16 Brigade, followed the route to the Alto Cuilo River hoping that the damaged bridge might still be usable. It wasn't, and the battle group was forced to swing north to Lubalo. This created another delay and D-day was moved further down the time-line; something neither FAA nor EO were too happy about.

General Antonio Faćeira, Duncan, and Carl again arrived by Mi-17 to finalise and coordinate the final phases of the attack on Cafunfu. They also reviewed the combat readiness of the brigade's battle groups, the state of the vehicles and weapons, and the logistical support required to sustain the final approach, attack, and consolidation of defensive positions at Cafunfu.

Battle Group Alpha's armoured fighting vehicles during a halt (photo: unknown)

To overcome further delays, General Marques, the area commander in Lunda Sul Province, ordered Colonel Nevis to take his Battle Group Alpha and continue to Lubalo. Once there, they were to link up with Pepe de Castro's Battle Group Bravo and the remainder of 16 Brigade.

Mike Herbst and his men were ordered to remain at Cacolo and continue training the home guard. Thankless as it was, Mike and his men squared their shoulders and continued with the task at hand.

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Meanwhile, Carl's intelligence-gathering efforts revealed that Battle Group Alpha could expect well-prepared anti-armour ambushes (utilising B-10/B-12[212] and 106 recoilless rifles,[7][213] and M-72 LAWs) along its route of advance. The ambushes would be well-protected by UNITA infantry and supported by 82mm and 60mm mortars. Carl also warned that 23mm anti-aircraft guns might be used in a ground-fire role.

Moving cautiously towards Lubalo, Nevis' Battle Group Alpha was forced to deploy dismounted infantry along the road verges to counter possible UNITA ambushes. Mines were also a very real threat so the advance had no option but to move at a snail's pace until the road ahead had been cleared and confirmed by their combat engineers.

In the Canhenque area they were joined by a company-strength group of Katangese soldiers commanded by a Major Andre. These aggressive, well-disciplined men, initially from the Katanga province in Zaire, were violently opposed to the Mobutu Sese Seko regime and this made them anti-UNITA too.

Colonel Nevis was somewhat agitated by the arrival of the Katangese but he allowed them to move with his battle group. Hennie, however, was quicker to realise the value of such seasoned troops and requested that they be incorporated into the EO combat team. Approaching Xingi, some of the Katangese disengaged from the combat team and swept through the town. At that moment, the EO combat team came under accurate and intense B-10 recoilless rifle and 60mm mortar fire. Jumping into action, the remaining Katangese troops and EO men launched an immediate counter-attack to silence the UNITA position on their right flank. Under heavy EO and Katangese fire, the surviving UNITA troops very hastily abandoned their positions and fled in disarray, leaving their dead behind.

As Battle Group Alpha neared Cafunfu, the quality of weapons and troops deployed by UNITA improved noticeably, as did their determination to stop the battle group. I was very concerned about inadvertently having created a sense of complacency within 16 Brigade with my intelligence report of 21 June.[214]

The leading elements of Nevis' battle group entered Xingi while the joint EO-

Katangese force continued counter-attacking the UNITA ambush position. Nevis' men almost immediately engaged a platoon-strength group of UNITA troops. The UNITA platoon withdrew under a ferocious assault, and the survivors escaped north along the road to occupy their next delaying position.

With Xingi secured, Battle Group Alpha cautiously approached Muhango, reaching their objective to achieve the long anticipated link-up with De Castro's Battle Group Bravo and the other elements of 16 Brigade by early afternoon. The two battle groups were now amalgamated into the brigade and for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. The EO men, however, remained together as a combat team.

Roelf van Heerden, now back from supporting his wife during childbirth, was attached to Brigadier Pepe de Castro's HQ as technical adviser.

Shortly after the action at Xingi, a UNITA agent I was running told me during a debrief that the FAA's aggression was causing grave concern:

16 Brigade just attacks us now. In the past they used to run but since being trained by Executive Outcomes, they no longer run. When our men at Xingi tried to delay the advance they attacked straight into our fire as though they weren't scared of dying. The way in which they are fighting is of concern to all of us. The war has changed. When we aren't hit on the ground, they attack from the air or come in by helicopters and decimate us. Our morale is low and we know that we are now losing the war. We can't carry on fighting like this. We are not even safe at night any more. We need to call for peace.

I was extremely pleased to note UNITA's anxieties; particularly their fear of the training EO had given to 16 Brigade.

On 26 June, the leading elements of 16 Brigade under command of Captain Mondoreal reached the Mucuegi River.

They immediately commenced with a river-crossing operation, driving their vehicles across the makeshift wooden bridge that UNITA had left intact. Not built to withstand such heavy traffic, the bridge soon collapsed under the strain. Making his way to the river where the force had ground to a halt, Oom Hennie was astonished to find Brigadier De Castro waist deep in the water, personally taking charge of the engineers.

The front end loader preparing a bridge abutment en route to Cafunfu (photo: H Blaauw)

Using their front-end loader, the sappers quickly prepared the launch area and the abutment, and the TMM—a mobile bridge-laying vehicle—was guided into position to

launch the bridge. As the banks of the river were at different levels, the pontoons and decking that formed the roadway were tilted at a dangerous angle. Hennie asked De Castro to allow his men to level the opposite abutment by hand but he was ignored—haste engendered a lack of caution. Unable to contain his impatience and not wanting to waste any more time, de Castro ordered the first vehicles to start crossing.

The remainder of Mondoreal's vehicles made it to the opposite bank and established a bridgehead but then de Castro ordered a BMP to tow the front-end loader across the bridge and this time, the laws of physics were unforgiving. The men watched in horror as the much-needed front-end loader slowly slipped off the bridge and settled into the river.

Ignoring this setback and in a hurry to complete the crossing, de Castro ordered the next vehicles in line to begin their move. Two DAF trucks towing twin-barrelled 23mm antiaircraft guns got stuck in the centre of the bridge and the advance ground to a halt. Mondoreal's men, meanwhile, were forced to expand the hasty bridgehead on the opposite bank of the river in order to increase the level of protection to the bogged-down river crossing operation.

Blaming the growing fiasco on the incompetence of his men, De Castro asked Hennie and his crews to take control of the crossing. By first light the next morning they had levelled the bridge, recovered the front-end loader from the river, and freed the DAF trucks and their valuable 23mm guns. Furious that the South Africans had been able to rectify the situation so quickly, the brigadier turned his anger on the FAA drivers, ordering them to get out of their vehicles so that our men could drive them across the bridge. By mid-afternoon the river crossing operation was complete.

The brigade then reformed and continued its advance. An hour later the TMM again had to be brought into use to cross the Luagi River.

South of Lubalo, Captain Mondoreal's lead elements drove into another large ambush. However, UNITA was now facing a very different FAA. In the past, such an ambush would have forced FAA to withdraw but not this time. With their 30mm guns blazing, the FAA's BMP-2s attacked the ambush position killing fourteen UNITA troops. The rest withdrew from their positions as fast as they could.

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Lafras and Nic van den Bergh were both in Luanda monitoring the status of the advance and arranging whatever they could to smooth the way for Hennie's combat team. They were continually on everyone's case in Angola, from Cabo Ledo to Rio Longa to Saurimo. In Pretoria, Nico Palm patiently kept the ship afloat while I ran off to meet agents, debrief them, and feed our own disinformation into MI, or flew out of the country to meet with potential government clients.

Meanwhile, the UN was still approving resolutions:

In its resolution 932 (1994) of 30 June 1994, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNAVEM II until 30 September 1994. The Council also declared its readiness to impose additional measures against UNITA if, by 31 July 1994, UNITA had not formally

accepted the complete set of proposals on national reconciliation put forward by the Special Representative and the three observer states. It strongly deplored the intensification of offensive military actions throughout Angola, condemned acts that imperilled humanitarian relief efforts, and urged both parties to grant immediate security clearances and guarantees for relief deliveries to all locations.

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At about 20:00 on 3 July UNITA fired a single mortar bomb into the EO combat team's temporary base. Knowing that the enemy was hoping to provoke a retaliation that would reveal their laager area and the size of their force, EO commanders ordered the men not to return fire. The crews waited quietly with fingers on triggers. Unable to draw a response, UNITA then launched an attack against the area where FAA had encamped. Mondoreal quickly repulsed this attack and at daybreak, some UNITA bodies were found close to the contact point. Numerous drag marks and blood trails were also found having been left by UNITA as they evacuated their wounded and dead.

Carl's intelligence reports also indicated that UNITA's forces seemed to be losing their fighting spirit. The intensity of their attacks was lessening and they would break ranks and flee or withdraw whenever the opportunity presented itself. I warned Carl not to let the men become complacent. UNITA still had many die-hard troops within its ranks and it was still possible that they would run in order to draw 16 Brigade into a well-prepared killing ground.

With the lead elements of the advance cutting a path ahead of them, the EO combat team reached Lubalo by mid-morning only to find that Brigadier Pepe de Castro and Colonel Nevis had already left and were about twenty kilometres ahead of them. Ploughing through the heat and dust in an effort to catch up to the rest of the brigade, Hennie and his men were stopped by locals who complained about having been treated badly by FAA troops.[215] When they finally caught up with Brigadier de Castro, Hennie expressed his disquiet about this. The brigadier promised to follow up the complaints but apparently did nothing.

Hennie expressed his views of de Castro to me:

Despite him not being scared to get his hands dirty, we never really got along—it was a sort of marriage made in hell. He was opinionated yet incompetent, and arrogant despite lacking basic knowledge of matters like command and control, deployment drills, and fire support—things that had been drilled into us as junior officers.

He would issue contradictory orders then change his mind at the last minute. If his junior officers questioned his orders, he would assault them in front of us, then blame them when things went wrong. It was all very frustrating. He and I just couldn't see eye to eye. He saw us as a threat to his command style and we also bitched and complained about how some of the FAA troops treated the locals. They, after all, were not to blame for the war and we needed them on our side.

Instead of executing a rapid advance (a quick approach and a swift attack on Cafunfu) we bumbled around. Fortunately, our guys knew where the problems lay but it was frustrating for all of us. We just wanted to get the job done. Initially, I thought he was a good commander, but as the pressure of the advance and pending attack grew, my opinion changed. I would say he was the most useless brigade commander I have ever served under.

I hadn't met Brigadier Pepe de Castro so I couldn't respond from personal experience, but I trusted Hennie's judgement. His assessment starkly contrasted Lafras' feedback regarding de Castro's behaviour at Soyo, but Hennie was a professional soldier and a highly competent commander who continually motivated his men. I surmised that De Castro was merely trying to put his stamp of authority on the brigade.

With Jos Grobler supporting Hennie, the EO combat team worked like a well- oiled machine. Despite being involved in several large firefights each day while contending with Pepe's command style, the morale amongst our men remained high. I later promised Hennie I would discuss his complaints with Generals De Matos and Itha when I next saw them, but he shrugged and told me not to bother. He believed the war was almost over.

That evening, much to the frustration of our men, Pepe de Castro prevented the planned refuelling of the BMP-2s. Our contingent considered it vitally important to bomb-up their vehicles, clean and oil their weapons, and refuel each night so that they would be ready to move at the first signs of daybreak. In addition, if UNITA ever launched a penetration night attack, the men and their vehicles would be ready to counter-attack and follow up immediately. This overruling would cost the brigade valuable time and flexibility, and also play to UNITA's tactical advantage.

Shortly after dawn, Duncan flew in with the Mi-17 resupply run and was briefed on the progress of the advance. The men also used this time to vent their frustration about Brigadier Pepe's poor command style. Duncan was a good listener.

The brigade finally recommenced its advance at noon. The EO commanders were disappointed about the time wasted as they felt they had lost some of the momentum Battle Group Alpha had worked so hard to achieve. The brigade had also surrendered some of the initiative to UNITA who now had sufficient time to prepare their next move.

Russian-built Ural truck towing a D-30 during the advance on Cafunfu

Shortly after 15:00, a DAF truck towing a 23mm gun detonated a landmine which destroyed both vehicle and gun and injured the driver and crew. Simultaneously the lead elements drove into another large UNITA ambush. The BMP-2s charged headlong into the ambush position and their 30mm decimated UNITA. After suffering numerous casualties, UNITA hastily abandoned their positions. FAA also suffered several casualties in the firefight but UNITA had once again been dealt a bloody nose—and lost valuable equipment and weapons.

A few hours before last light, Duncan radioed Hennie from Saurimo and told him that the Mi-17s were speeding things up by leap-frogging FAA commandos ahead of the advance to clear and hold tactical terrain. Other helicopters were also en route to collect the FAA wounded. The medics were instructed to prepare them for casevac.

Charlie and Sonny were first to hit the LZ to drop supplies and uplift the casualties. Arthur and Carl orbited overhead with their door gunners ready to give suppressing fire with the PKM machine guns. Charlie and Sonny had to fight off several uninjured FAA troops from Battle Group Bravo who had abandoned their wounded and wanted to get out of the area and as far away from Pepe de Castro as they could. After they finally managed to lift off from the LZ, Arthur and Carl came in to land, and experienced the same problem. Scared, inexperienced, and more terrified of Pepe de Castro than they were of UNITA, some of the FAA troops were ready to desert their units. After the door gunners beat off the would-be deserters, the Mi-17 eventually managed to lift out of their LZ. Despite being seriously overloaded, the two Mi-17s staggered back to Saurimo in a very dark sky.

That night, Brigadier Pepe de Castro asked Hennie to take his combat team, clear the road to Muengue, and bypass it by a few kilometres in the hope it would confuse UNITA about the brigade's true intentions. De Castro's plan was to follow the EO combat team, then swing west and drive hard for their next objective. Hennie's team would double back and then adopt their usual position as the rear guard. The brigade had already taken avoidable casualties so Hennie was very keen to lead the advance and prevent that from happening again. To his great disappointment they had, as yet encountered no serious resistance.

16 Brigade, once again organised into two battle groups, each with its own combat teams, followed Hennie's combat team to a pre-arranged grid reference and then swung west towards the next objective. Shortly thereafter, they drove into a large, well-prepared UNITA ambush approximately ten kilometres east of the Chifa River bridge.

Mondoreal, leading the advance, proved his aggression by immediately attacking the UNITA ambush positions while the EO combat team flanked UNITA's positions. Unable to withstand the FAA's fierce frontal counter-attack, UNITA broke ranks and fled into the bush in disarray. Several of them were also killed as the BMP-2s ran them down and crushed them. Following up, the EO men debussed from their IFVs and swept through the

ambush position where they tallied fourteen bodies. The men were surprised at the poor state of the UNITA dead, who were emaciated and poorly equipped.

The men also found corpses with Zairian military identity cards on them—proof that President Mobutu was actively aiding UNITA in its war against the FAA. It also proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mobutu had his own agenda regarding the Angolan diamond fields.

I passed this information to journalists De Wet Potgieter and Peta Thornycroft expecting them to follow up. Zaire, to the north of Angola, was a known supply point for South African aircraft making illegal night flights to trade weapons and food for diamonds. I thought there would at least be some interest in following up this information. Again they preferred to regurgitate Military Intelligence's lie that we had treacherously betrayed UNITA by switching sides to get more money. In future, this 'fact' would be repeated in numerous erroneous articles. In later years, these deceptive articles would be quoted in numerous 'academic' papers.[216]

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The bridge across the Chifa River had by now been destroyed by the retreating enemy, and Hennie's combat team was tasked to develop a solution that would enable the brigade to cross. Working with the front-end loader they had recovered from a watery grave in the Mucuegi, they toiled through the night, cutting logs, moving tons of sand, and opening approaches. Patrols were deployed to monitor any UNITA activity which might have threatened the teams working on bridging the river.

By early morning of 8 July, the exhausted EO men had spanned the gap with an improvised bridge and the advance continued.

UNITA, in their retreating wake, was still summarily executing and assaulting the local population.

Although not referring specifically to UNITA, UNAVEM II noted in their report:

In resolution 932 (1994) of 30 June 1994, the Security Council deplored the worsening of the humanitarian situation, urged the parties to grant all necessary security guarantees and to refrain from actions endangering relief personnel or disrupting humanitarian assistance.

While the river-crossing operation was in progress, a Katangese patrol returned with two prisoners who they delivered to Hennie's command vehicle for interrogation. The FAA demanded their summary execution, but Hennie and the Katangese were adamant they should be spared. FAA grudgingly accepted, and under interrogation by EO's men the prisoners disclosed that:

They were part of UNITA's 12 Regular Battalion and had taken part in the ambush east of the Chifa River Bridge the previous day. On 2 June—four days before the ambush, about 200 men from their battalion had left Cafunfu by vehicle and crossed the Chifa

River intending to delay the brigade's advance. Their orders, apparently received from South Africa, were to harass the brigade in the Lubalo area and fight a series of delaying actions to wear down the brigade.

The same day, another 200 men had left Cafunfu with orders to attack and retake Cacolo. This tallied with the intelligence I had previously given Carl.

Being unsure of the brigade's advance route, UNITA's senior officers had deployed a third battalion on the road between Camaxilo and Cafunfu.

Eleven ZSU-23-2s and ZSU-23-4s[217] had been deployed in and around Cafunfu. UNITA's 'cabinet' had been almost entirely wiped out by an air strike (carried out by Pine Pienaar during one of his numerous MiG-23 hunting expeditions) in late June or early July.

The bodies of three white men had been brought in from Camaxilo and were buried near Cafunfu.

They had seen two white prisoners—one wounded (Hennie believed these were Renier van der Merwe and Steyn Marais, captured during their small- team reconnaissance near Cafunfu. Now he could at least hope that some of his comrades might still be alive). There was no mention of Handsome Ndhlovu, the third member of the team.

Hennie and his combat team kept the two prisoners under close guard and refused to hand them over to the FAA where their fate would have been a foregone conclusion.

The brigade now knew what UNITA's intentions were. Hennie immediately radioed Mike Herbst (still training the home guard at Cacolo) and told him that a large UNITA force was on its way to attack and overrun his position. They needed to prepare a violent reception for the enemy.

As the advance continued, Colonel Nevis reported an approximately 200-strong UNITA force racing ahead of his lead elements, towing a 23mm gun.

Shortly thereafter, another one of 16 Brigade's DAF vehicles was destroyed by a landmine, but fortunately it was possible to recover the 23mm gun it was towing.

Then the TMM detonated an anti-personnel mine and they were forced to halt while the wheel was replaced.

These incidents indicated that the brigade was entering a prepared UNITA defensive area where nuisance and barrier minefields could be expected. Hennie anticipated that UNITA would show determination in holding on to Cafunfu despite my previous intelligence reports to the contrary (I believed that UNITA would abandon Cafunfu as they were rapidly losing their will to fight).

Soon after the advance got under way again, the lead elements had another contact with the enemy. One FAA soldier was killed and another three were wounded before UNITA broke contact and withdrew.

Hennie called for helicopters to be placed on standby for casevac duties and also requested armed reconnaissance and interdiction patrols from our MiG-23s.

That night, UNITA attacked the laager position, firing 23mm anti-aircraft guns at the men and their vehicles. The FAA responded with their own weapons and shortly thereafter

UNITA withdrew. Hennie and Jos were surprised to find that none of their men or vehicles had been hit—UNITA's fire had mostly passed overhead.

Early on the morning of 9 July, the brigade came under very intense UNITA fire from 82mm mortars and B-10 and 106mm recoilless rifles. During this bombardment, Brigadier Pepe de Castro ordered Hennie's combat team to move forward and link up with Captain Mondoreal's forces. Moving in an offensive formation with the BMP-2s ready to attack any target that made its appearance, the EO combat team ploughed through the bush and UNITA's bombardment to link up with Mondoreal. Due to radio communications problems, both Hennie and Mondoreal had to dismount from their vehicles under fire and find a 'quiet spot'—something that wasn't easy at that stage—to plan their counter-attack. With plans made, they once again dashed through the withering fire to the safety of their vehicles.

A UNITA 106mm gun being moved to attack FAA forces (photo: Jim Hooper)

UNITA then switched the focus of their attack and struck at the rear echelons of the brigade with mortar, RPG-7 and small-arms fire, wounding two of Hennie's men. The rear guard, however, put up stiff resistance and repulsed the attack.

The combat teams fought their way out of UNITA's killing ground and moved cross-country to a village the enemy had been using as a temporary base. UNITA continued to harass the combat teams with stand-off bombardments and delaying attacks. At mid-afternoon Pine Pienaar was scrambled to deliver close air support with his MiG-23. Taking evasive action in case UNITA was deploying SAMs, he rolled down and pounded the village of Sassa to where the enemy had withdrawn. While pulling out of his bomb run he spotted a Mercedes Benz truck trying to make a getaway. He strafed it with cannon fire and set it ablaze, killing numerous UNITA troops on the vehicle.

While the fighting raged, an FAA BMP-2 detonated a landmine, killing its three- man crew and incinerating the six infantrymen in its rear. Casevacs, a resupply of ammunition, and spare tyres were called for as many of the tyres on the wheeled vehicles had been shot out.

The pilots at Saurimo were faced with a serious dilemma—only one Mi-17 was serviceable and using a single helicopter in a combat zone broke all the rules of combat

flying, but there was no option; the combat teams were in desperate need of ammunition and other supplies. The FAA casualties also required evacuation.

Hennie warned the pilots that there was a lot of incoming UNITA fire. Their approach to the LZ would need to be chosen for maximum protection as there would be no orbiting Mi-17 to cover them with suppressing machine-gun fire. Realising the dangers they faced, Carl Alberts and Arthur nevertheless lifted off from Saurimo and headed to the combat zone and their friends.

Coming in to land with the heavily-laden Mi-17 , and while still making their descent, they suddenly lost an engine about twenty metres above the ground.

Carl later recounted:

We were coming in to land and I suddenly felt the chopper losing power. I also saw the left-hand engine failure light on the panel between my knees going moggy and realised we had lost a fucking engine.

"Hey Arthur, we're fucked...an engine's gone...we've lost a fucking engine," I said to him over the radio as if he didn't know it.

"Agh, fucking Russian engines," he responded as calmly as if he was asking the price of a dozen eggs.

We came in hard and fast and landed in a massive cloud of dust about 500 metres short of the landing zone. I swear we hadn't even hit the ground when Hennie's voice came through on the radio:

"Carl, what the fuck are you doing? You're supposed to land by the fucking BMPs—not in the bloody bush! Now fly your fucking chopper here to where we're waiting for you."

Arthur and I just looked at each other with stupid grins on our faces. Our 'fucking chopper' wasn't going anywhere. Without its second engine it didn't have sufficient power to lift off again.

Realising that the helicopter was in serious trouble, the EO BMPs raced through the bush towards the crippled machine, firing their 30mm guns blindly into the bush around it. The Mi-17 was hurriedly unloaded and the casevacs loaded in.

Again FAA would-be deserters came running through the bush and fought to get aboard. The door gunners had to kick and punch them away. It didn't make much difference, though, because the helicopter was still unable to lift off. The pilots decided to shut down the remaining engine and try to effect emergency repairs.

With the very real danger of the Mi-17 becoming a UNITA target, Hennie radioed Duncan and told him they had a problem on the LZ. Pine was hurriedly scrambled from Saurimo to give close air support with his MiG-23. As Pine circled and emptied his bomb and gun loads on to perceived UNITA positions, Carl and Arthur finally managed to get both engines fired up again and lifted out of the LZ carrying the FAA casualties going to Saurimo for treatment.

Meanwhile, EO's combat team had established a temporary base where the men set to work to repair damaged vehicles. Jan Kellerman was tasked to resolve that problem and to

Hennie's satisfaction, Jan and his volunteers had most of the vehicles back on the road by daybreak on 10 July.

A MiG-23 being inspected prior to a close air support mission to support Battle Group A (photo: unknown)

That night, I debriefed a Military Intelligence agent who told me that certain elements within MI and Foreign Affairs were very concerned about UNITA having failed to halt the advance of 16 Brigade. They considered it imperative that UNITA cling to Cafunfu at all costs because there was 'a lot at stake'. He also confirmed that UNITA was poised to launch a large-scale attack on Cacolo. I had already been told about this plan by another agent, but I still passed it on to Saurimo as confirmation. The fact that a second MI agent knew about the pending attack on Cacolo was once again proof of the cosy relationship UNITA had with MI. It was also a further indication of the political pressure that the elements in South African government was putting on MI and DFA, even if it was now an ANC-dominated government.

At daybreak, Pine was again overhead the brigade assembly area, this time in a PC-7 looking for targets. With nothing important to attack, he turned back to Saurimo.

Two EO men approached Hennie and asked to be reassigned elsewhere in the company. Both were fairly inexperienced and the stress of the constant danger and numerous contacts over the previous few days was beginning to show. Knowing that they were good men, Hennie took pity on them and consented, but he was unable to get them out of the firing line and back to Saurimo immediately. As the planned capture of Cafunfu was entering a crucial stage, Hennie also feared they might pose a security risk and jeopardise the operation if he allowed them to return to South Africa. He told them they could leave for Saurimo on the next available Mi-17 that came in and reassigned them to the logistical convoy where he hoped they would settle down until he could relieve them from combat duties.

As helicopters were now in short supply due to battle damage and technical issues that required urgent attention, resupplying 16 Brigade had become a problem—and the only available option was to do so by air.

Much needed supplies were to be brought in by a high-altitude parachute drop that was planned for the morning of 11 July. Realising the need to urgently resupply the brigade, FAA contracted a Russian company to plan and execute the air drop.

Pine, now in a MiG-23, flew ahead to conduct an aerial reconnaissance of the area, identify a suitable drop zone (DZ) and later escort cargo aircraft. The brigade reached the planned DZ without incident and set about marking it for the parachute delivery. Brigadier Pepe de Castro chose that moment to inform Hennie that he planned to alter the cargo of the drops. Hennie furiously argued that such a decision was not only irresponsible but also impossible as the heavy Il-76 cargo aircraft were already airborne and en route to the DZ. The brigadier, not unexpectedly, stormed off in a huff.

With the DZ's orange marker panels in position, the men waited for the Il- 76 to come in for the drop. As the plane lumbered along at 2 000 metres above sea level, the Russian crews rolled out the huge pallets containing badly needed supplies. The drogue stabilised pallets free-fell to 300 metres above ground before automatic openers released the cargo parachutes. With the large parachute canopies blossoming in the sky, the pallets drifted down. Much to everyone's astonishment, they landed in the centre of the DZ.

Oom Hennie later told me, "The Russian pilots were brilliant! Their entire load landed smack bang on target. I have never before seen such an accurate display of air supply in combat."

As the pallets hit the DZ, Pine streaked overhead in his MiG-23, radioing that he was taking ground fire from a position to the north of 16 Brigade's position. After unloading his ordnance onto UNITA's positions, he turned back to Saurimo to refuel, rearm, and await new orders.

16 Brigade's next objective was Firiquich, a town that lay on the crossroads to Camaxilo, Cuango, and Cafunfu. Firiquich was an important intermediate objective for the final assault on Cafunfu and the brigade had to take it if the attack on Cafunfu was to succeed. UNITA, too, were by now aware of the axis of advance and were preparing to defend Firiquich at all costs—or so their political leadership hoped.

Hennie arranged for an air strike to hit Firiquich at 10:00 on 12 July to soften up and neutralise UNITA's predicted defences prior to the assault on the town.

UNITA had in the meantime been active in 16 Brigade's rear area, planning to surprise the meagre force that Hennie had left at Cacolo. Mike and his small team, aware of the growing threat, had continued to expand and strengthen their defensive positions and apply deception and immediate action plans in case of such an attack.

At around 23:00 on the night of 11 July, UNITA struck Cacolo, exactly as the two UNITA POWs and my agents had indicated they would. With the early warnings received from Hennie and Saurimo, Mike and his men were ready and waiting for the attack on their isolated position.

The onslaught commenced with a heavy 82mm mortar bombardment followed by a penetration night attack. The 82mm mortars were ranged on the area where Mike and his men usually slept. It was obvious that UNITA or its supporters in Cacolo had infiltrated the area, paced out ranges, and taken the bearings they needed for the accurate bombardment and subsequent attack.

However, Mike and his men had taken precautions. They silently left their sleeping quarters after last light every day and entered into well-prepared ambush positions along the route where UNITA was most likely to attack. Mike's appreciation of their intentions and direction of attack had been correct. He and his men watched silently as the UNITA penetration force entered the killing zone and forming-up place they had carefully prepared for their attack.

UNITA was caught totally by surprise as Mike's ambush group opened fire and immediately killed seven of them. The rest of the UNITA assault team, accompanied by withering fire from Mike and his team, fled into the bush in blind panic, many of them shocked and wounded. They had most likely expected an easy repeat of the successful night penetration attack they had staged at Saurimo. Things had changed.

At first light Mike and his men launched a follow-up and discovered four freshly dug graves and numerous blood trails—an indication that the enemy had suffered badly. Several weapons and a lot of ammunition were also recovered.

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On the same day, an Mi-17 landed at the brigade's laager area with replacements for two casualties and the two men who had asked to be reassigned. Knowing that UNITA would make it a busy day, the replacements were quickly briefed and assigned their positions in the EO combat team.

By 07:00 the BMP-2s moved out and continued their advance on Firiquich.

The column trailed a dense cloud of dust and ash generated from the numerous recent bush fires UNITA had started. About 2 000 metres from Firiquich the lead elements began to draw accurate mortar, B-10, and 106mm recoilless rifle fire. Realising they had entered the killing zone of a well-planned long-range ambush, the BMPs began returning fire with their 30mm guns. Shortly thereafter, UNITA's 23mm anti-aircraft guns opened up on the BMPs.

Following the initial plan of attack, Nevis' mechanised forces advanced over as wide a front as the terrain would allow. Travelling on the right flank, Hennie's combat team were tasked to swing to the right of Firiquich, bypass the town, and take up a position on the road leading north to Cafunfu where they would lie in wait to cut off any retreating UNITA elements.

While the rest of the forces under the command of Colonel Nevis and Captain Mondoreal raced towards their objective, Hennie's combat team made their right flanking manoeuvre and crested a small ridge where they again came under accurate and intensive mortar fire. Spearheading his combat team with the 30mm guns engaging likely targets and gun-positions, Hennie's BMP ploughed headlong into a dug-out tank trap, so well camouflaged that it had not been visible.

Hennie's driver, Paul, vainly tried to reverse out of the trap, realising that the BMP made a perfect target for the enemy's anti-tank weapons. Jos immediately summed up the situation, assumed command, and pulled the combat team's BMP- 2s back to deliver covering fire for the trapped vehicle.

Hennie later told me:

I was flung against the BMP's bulkhead and thought we had taken a direct hit. Seconds later, I realised we had been caught in a tank trap. None of the men were injured, but we were all shaken up by the sudden impact.

Amazingly, there was no sign of panic within the vehicle. Our infantry signalled that they were okay from the back seat. Paul desperately tried to reverse us out of the trap but the BMP's tracks couldn't get a grip. We were a sitting duck for UNITA's anti-tank guns but miraculously, they didn't hit us.

I heard Jos calmly giving orders over the radio and soon there were BMPs all around us, firing at every conceivable target and shielding us from UNITA's fire. Fortunately, none of UNITA's rounds landed on the top of the BMPs where the skin is thinnest. That would have caused us massive casualties.

I heard a BMP pulling to a stop behind us. Jos had ordered Riaan to pull us out of the trap.

By then UNITA's mortar and small arms fire had grown intense. Weathering the storm of lead and shrapnel, Riaan's crew dismounted under fire and calmly hitched a tow cable to the back of our BMP. While this was going on Jos was still manoeuvring the BMPs to continue shielding us. We sat and listened helplessly to the small arms fire and shrapnel hitting our BMP.

Riaan's BMP engaged reverse and when Paul felt tension on the cable, he engaged reverse and we were jerked from the hole in a huge cloud of dust and ash. Looking back at the incredible bravery of the crews under intense fire, I can only shake my head and say that you don't see courage like that on the battlefield every day. Had we been using South African Ratels, we would surely all have been killed. I was grateful that Armscor had refused to sell Ratels to the FAA.[218] With its low silhouette and manoeuvrability, the BMP is a far superior vehicle.

With Hennie's BMP out of the tank-trap, the EO combat team advanced slowly towards a ridge line where UNITA forces seemed to be concentrated. As they drew near, the Katangese infantry dismounted and began an assault on the ridge line but the mortar fire seemed to be dying down. Some EO BMPs were already racing towards the Cafunfu road to cut off retreating UNITA vehicles and troops.

Dismounting from the remaining BMPs, the EO men quickly joined the assault to support the Katangese infantry. Moving forward under covering fire from the BMP's 30mm guns and AGS-17 grenade launchers, the attack soon penetrated and overran UNITA's ambush positions.

UNITA's indirect fire support had also fallen silent.

As the infantry swept through a densely wooded area, those who were not dead or dying fled in disarray and came under heavy and sustained 30mm, AGS-17, and PKM fire. Linking up with their BMPs, the infantry estimated that they had killed approximately 100 UNITA troops in the firefight with many more wounded, although they had not stopped for a body count.

By mid-afternoon, the EO combat team—which had split up during the initial ambush and counter-attack—once more linked up. Despite having crossed a very well-prepared UNITA killing ground, there was not a single casualty amongst the men. Hennie attributed this to EO's aggressive and immediate counteractions and the large volume of accurate and sustained fire with which they had been supported.

Colonel Nevis' men had made good progress in Firiquich and had encountered little resistance. By late afternoon Captain Mondoreal and his men had linked up with Hennie's combat team. Morale was at an all-time high and the commanders were proud of their men for the quick and successful actions they had undertaken that day.

Bypassing a small village about two kilometres north of Firiquich, the teams consolidated their positions and set up a temporary base for the night. While sentries manned listening posts outside the perimeter, the crews attended to the daily maintenance of vehicles and weapons.

Colonel Nevis' combat teams returned to the ambush site to collect and destroy the abandoned enemy weapons the brigade would not need. There they counted 73 enemy bodies, among them the body of General Antonio Nevis, a senior UNITA commander.[219] There were numerous blood trails as well, indicating several UNITA wounded.

UNITA had taken a severe beating and lost a significant number of troops—as well as one of their generals—in a matter of days. They had also lost a significant number of heavy weapons and suffered a severe blow to their morale. They realised too that 16 Brigade was determined to attack and capture Cafunfu and wipe out all resistance in its path.

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Since the end of 1992, there had been differing views in South Africa and the international community about how the country's apartheid past and legacy should be dealt with. The ultimate outcome was the establishment of a TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) in June 1994.

The Act stipulated that the TRC should complete its work within eighteen months (a period that could be extended to two years by the president). Operating through three plenary committees—human rights violations, amnesty and reconciliation, and reparation, its work would involve hearing the stories of the victims of gross human- rights violations, and considering applications for amnesty from perpetrators of human-rights violations. It would also make recommendations on reparation/ restitution to victims, and attempt to institutionalise practices, structures, and attitudes that would prevent similar future excesses.

Journalist Peta Thornycroft visited Nico and I at Danny Street and offered to accompany us— particularly me—to the TRC to confess our misdeeds. She was obviously convinced that if she got me to the TRC, she would have the scoop of her career. No doubt, she felt that her 'confidential sources' in the intelligence establishment would add to the repertoire of lies she had already published.

I told her that if she had any evidence of me having committed crimes or atrocities as a serving soldier in the SADF or as a member of the DCC or CCB, she was welcome to report them directly to the TRC. The same applied to my men. I wouldn't force anyone to attend the TRC's amnesty hearings regardless of whether they had been members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the SADF, the SACP, the DCC, or the CCB. I could only recommend that those who felt the need for amnesty should apply individually. The company would assist them where possible.

Thornycroft left feeling decidedly unhappy about my decision.

18:
The Fall of Cafunfu

With the new Government of National Unity in place in South Africa, changes happened fast. The Department of Defence, under Minister Joe Modise and Deputy Minister Ronnie Kasrils, embarked on a programme to integrate Apartheid Era South Africa's various armed forces into a single unified South African National Defence Force (SANDF). In this endeavour, they were keenly supported by a string of 'foreign advisors' who it seemed were intent on drastically weakening the South African armed forces. This process had been facilitated by de Klerk and his cronies' appeasing efforts to shut down all combat-experienced units.

Although the SADF was formally renamed the SANDF on 27 April 1994, the unification was not that simple and it took time to accomplish. In the end it comprised the so-called statutory forces—SADF, Transkei Defence Force, Ciskei Defence Force, Bophuthatswana Defence Force, and Venda Defence Force—and the 'non-statutory forces'—the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the Pan Africanist Congress' Azanian Peoples Liberation Army (APLA), and Inkatha Freedom Party's KwaZulu Self-Protection Force (KZSPF).

I sought a meeting with Deputy Minister Kasrils in late May 1994, and was mildly surprised by the speed at which it was arranged. In the old South African administration it had been virtually impossible to meet a deputy minister, let alone a minister—at short notice.

I asked for, and got, a meeting with Minister of Defence Ronnie Kasrils, hoping to explain EO's true role in Angola. It was a waste of time as he had already been briefed with false intelligence (photo: News24.com)

I felt it important to explain Executive Outcomes' position regarding the political and security climate in South and Southern Africa, including the so-called Great Lakes area, and to assure him that we were not destabilising African governments— we had been invited to assist them. The company was not transgressing any South African laws nor were we training 'hit-squads', as Jan Breytenbach and the media had told a gullible South African public.

We met at the Midrand Protea Hotel between Pretoria and Johannesburg on around 2 June. Kasrils was cordial and friendly and although I did not like his politics, I took a liking to him—even though a few years previously we had been designated enemies by our political masters. As an erstwhile enemy of the SADF, he was now the deputy minister in charge of the SANDF. I was sure the irony was not lost on him.

"Please call me Ronnie," he began, setting the scene for what became an informal discussion.

I raised issues relating to EO and what the DFA, the intelligence services, Strategic Concepts, and the media were reporting about us.

Kasrils listened intently, at times interrupting where he wanted clarification. He was apparently keen to hear my side of the story and, in conclusion, told me that although he did not entirely agree with my assessment of the Angolan situation, he understood my concerns about what was happening there.

I realised that, being new to his chair, he would be surrounded by old-guard intelligence officers who would exploit his lack of knowledge on the secrecy that shrouded South Africa's support of UNITA through its projects Spyker and Silver.

Deceiving the newly appointed ANC government ministers would have been relatively simple: they couldn't have been expected to know about the legacy of deception and intrigue they had inherited in their departments. Besides, many of the old staffers had probably lied to the outgoing government as well without ever having been caught out.

We parted on reasonably friendly terms but I realised Kasrils would not be able to stem the flow of false intelligence or necessarily even verify that it was false, even though he was sitting in a key position. I would now have to defend the company against both the old government and the new ANC-led GNU. I had enemies in both camps.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Military Intelligence in particular were, like UNITA, apparently entering a state of high panic as 16 Brigade's advance towards Cafunfu forged ahead, leaving dead, dying and fleeing UNITA forces in its wake. I was also told by an agent that there was considerable concern within MI about who would retain their posts in the newly created SANDF. Many MI officers were willing to do whatever it took, even if it meant speciously depicting EO as a threat to the new government's national security.

To succeed in their deception, they needed to exploit their agents in the media but according to the agent, it was an open secret in both MI and the DFA that EO was to be stopped at any cost. Desperation was setting in.

I took a secret early morning chartered flight to Luanda on around 16 June and met Generals De Matos and Itha to brief them on my discussion with Deputy Minister Ronnie Kasrils. Several prominent Angolan government ministers who attended that meeting (including a representative from President dos Santos' office) expressed growing dismay and anger when they realised the ANC government was apparently intent on allowing the previous government's policy of destabilisation and destruction to continue.

At the conclusion of the meeting, I spoke to the generals about their thoughts on 16 Brigade's advance and the counter-actions UNITA would probably take on the political and military fronts. I also reiterated that the MPLA and FAA should make concerted efforts to seize control of the informational environment as UNITA were winning the propaganda war. Such actions would also lift the considerable pressure that I was dealing with, constantly having to contend with media accusations and lies.

I flew back to South Africa later that afternoon, not too optimistic about getting any relief from the Angolans as far as the disinformation war raging around EO and myself was concerned.

Johann Smith reported that an increasingly desperate Sean Cleary was regularly feeding disinformation to the DFA, the UN, and 'others' about our alleged destabilising actions, in an attempt to get the international community to pressurise the Angolan government into removing EO from Angola.

Cleary, he said, had become increasingly concerned about UNITA's numerous defeats in the field and was even more concerned about how UNITA's possible defeat in the diamond-rich Lunda provinces would impact on his major client—De Beers Consolidated.

It was for this reason, Smith alleged, that Cleary, in desperation, had written directly to President dos Santos on 22 June 1994. Smith gave me copies of the letter in both Portuguese and English:

As I said to Colonel Miala last night, however, I am happy to help in building a stable peace in Angola and prepared to travel to Luanda for discussions with you on how best to achieve this. My efforts for ten years have been directed to finding ways to establish peace in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. Angola, since 1989, has absorbed a very large share of these efforts. After peace seemed attainable in 1991, moreover, our efforts shifted to attempts to helping develop a stable environment for sustainable development to the benefit of all Angolans. When the peace failed in 1992, we redoubled our efforts to help construct it ... Since speaking to Colonel Miala, however, I have become aware of another issue that may prejudice my ability to secure support in South Africa for additional efforts to help you and Dr Savimbi find a basis for lasting peace ... I am seeking to help you avoid consequences that would, if my information is correct, seriously harm Angola's chances of attracting international investment.

While I do not know all the facts and have no desire to interfere in the workings of government, I am deeply concerned by what I have learnt. I understand that the Government of Angola may take a formal decision on 26 June on the award of prospecting rights for primary (kimberlite) deposits in the upper drainage area of the Cuango river ... prospecting rights ... in this area have been the object of negotiations

between the GRA and ... De Beers ... If these rights are now awarded to another party ... it would be impossible to persuade South African companies and financial institutions to invest on a meaningful scale in Angola ... such a decision would be seen here as evidence of bad faith ... It would have negative repercussions that I would much prefer to avoid. Your assistance in ensuring that no decision prejudicial to the rights De Beers believes it has ... will greatly assist in preparing the way for the constructive efforts we may agree that I should take to help in consolidating peace and development in Angola.

Cleary's letter made me laugh as he was certainly not interested in seeing any peace agreement that would favour President dos Santos' government. His desperate letter made it very clear that he was after Angola's diamonds and the veiled threat regarding his concerns was very obvious. His interest in the kimberlite areas in the upper drainage area of the Cuango river (coincidentally an area of great strategic interest to his client, Dr Jonas Savimbi of UNITA, and also to his clients in South Africa) was equally enlightening. He had merely confirmed that Angolan diamonds were very high on South Africa's list of foreign economic priorities. It again struck me as strange that South Africa, even under a newly created ANC government, was moulding its foreign policy to favour private economic interests.

I also found it deeply ironic that a man who had been making false claims about Executive Outcomes having been paid in diamond concessions was now so worried about the diamond areas UNITA was sure to lose in the coming weeks. He must have been finding it difficult to juggle the agendas and interests of so many employers, MI's DST among them.

In my opinion, South Africa's support for UNITA—which had long been described as 'terminated'—was still alive and very well, and there were still powerful elements within the South African government who desperately wanted to see the MPLA overthrown. As usual, South African taxpayers were blissfully unaware of how their monies were being spent. Instead, many joined the chorus of condemnation against EO. Choosing to believe what the media had fed them, many who I had considered good friends and ex comrades-in-arms also showed their true colours and stopped talking to me.

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During the lead up to the final assault on Cafunfu, the volume of calls from journalists wanting to interview me became so heavy that it clogged up our office phone lines and made it virtually impossible to use them for business. None of the journalists were keen to expose the duplicity of Military Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, or anybody else that might have been lying about EO, and comments I had never made were continually attributed to me, all in the name of 'public interest'.

In early July a Dutch journalist who identified himself as 'Pieter De Boer' called, claiming that he needed to see me urgently. Speaking with a heavy accent, he said he had stumbled on something which was of great importance to both EO and me— something

that was about to place my men's lives in great danger. I immediately gave him my full attention.

"Would you like to come to my office? We can talk here without any interruption," I said.

"No, that's too risky for me. Someone might identify me or recognise my car. I'd prefer to meet where no one will see us."

I reasoned that if De Boer had information about some kind of attack being planned against my men, I owed it to everyone to hear what he had to say. The last thing I needed was a repeat of Saurimo.

"I can meet you this evening after dark," he said, "in Springbok Park[220]—the wild gardens—between Schoeman and Pretorius Streets. Is that okay?"

I had always believed in retaining the initiative—determining time and place— when setting up meetings, but this time I agreed without argument.

"Okay, how will I recognise you?"

"I know what you look like. If anyone is listening in on this phone call and I give a description, they will be able to identify me. I will see you at the Schoeman Street entrance at 21:00," he responded.

I accepted the arrangement, but in retrospect, I should have realised it was a set-up. It never even occurred to me that 'De Boer' had timed his call for only a few minutes after Nico and Daleen, our secretary, had left the offices. That indicated there must have been surveillance on the office. Besides, anybody listening in would not have needed De Boer's description to find him.

I made my arrangements for the meeting.

For some inexplicable reason I unlocked the safe, checked my pistol, slipped it into its holster, and buckled it to my belt—something I had long stopped bothering to do.

I left the office at 20:00, leaving sufficient time to case out the meeting place to ensure it was free of surveillance teams. I reached the park about 30 minutes before the agreed time, parked in Church Street, and walked around the block to the corner of Schoeman and Hilda Streets thinking I would be able to pick up any suspicious activity approaching from that direction, but I didn't see anything that alarmed me.

I entered the Schoeman Street gate at precisely 21:00.

The lighting in the park was poor as the street lights did not penetrate the dense foliage of the trees. I had just passed through the gate when a figure appeared on the footpath about five metres ahead of me. I had spent enough time at war to realise from his silhouette that he was pointing something at me—and it certainly wasn't a torch.

The entrance to Springbok Park in Pretoria where 'Dutch journalist' De Boer tried to shoot me (photo: Showme.co.za)

"Mister Barlow?" he said in a heavy Afrikaans accent. Gone was the Dutch accent. I instinctively dived for the ground and heard the distinctive 'pop-pop' of a silenced pistol. Probably a .22 calibre, I thought, as I hastily pulled my own pistol from its holster.

De Boer, or whoever he was, was already running when I fired two shots at him in quick succession with my 9mm. Although we were in a park, it was still a built-up area and I couldn't fire indiscriminately for fear of perhaps hitting someone else, a car, or even a house. To this day I don't know if I hit him or if he just stumbled, but I saw him stagger and then continue running. I had no intention of going to see if I had indeed shot him. The loud reports of my pistol would attract a lot of unnecessary attention.

My first thought was to get out of the area in case De Boer had back-up lurking in the bushes, but only after I had picked up my empty cartridge cases. If the police found them it would only be a matter of time before they linked them to my pistol through ballistic identification.

By then, I was certain that on my way out of the park, 'they' would be waiting for me, so I moved as though I was in a combat zone, using every bit of cover the shadows offered. I got to my car at approximately 21:20.

Thankfully, I still couldn't hear any police sirens.

Back at the office I made myself a strong cup of coffee and smoked five cigarettes in quick succession.

'You bastards,' I thought, 'we must be hurting you badly for you to have tried something so drastic.'

I was now even more convinced that 16 Brigade's advance, the imminent capture of Cafunfu, and the destruction of UNITA's defensive efforts was making my many enemies increasingly apprehensive. Their belief that killing me would halt any actions against UNITA was astoundingly naive.

I consoled myself that even though I was becoming worn out with exhaustion, I had kept a cool head. I had survived a serious attempt on my life and it was likely there would

be more in the future. After this, whenever I attended a meeting, I took a team of armed watchers to cover my back. If someone out there really wanted to kill me, I would make sure they died with me.

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When dawn broke over eastern Angola on 13 July 1994, the men were ready to continue their advance on Cafunfu. They dismantled and cleared their temporary bases causing as little disruption to the area as possible, and Hennie Blaauw's combat team and Captain Mondoreal's force, located to the north of Firiquich, mounted their vehicles and waited for their orders to move.

Then they heard the dull thud of mortar bombs hitting their base plates in the distance. Seconds later the mortar bombs were on a flight path to Firiquich where the remainder of 16 Brigade had harboured for the night. The brigade came under an accurate and intense 120mm mortar bombardment and was forced to rapidly move its position to avoid casualties and damage to vehicles. Within Firiquich, vehicles and men scrambled for cover as the barrage increased in intensity.

While listening to the far-off crump of the 120mm mortar bombs exploding in the brigade area, Hennie and his men suddenly heard the thumping of mortar bombs striking base plates directly ahead of them and correctly assumed that UNITA's 82mm mortars had joined the bombardment. The 82mm has a lesser range than the 120mm mortar, so the crews would have had to deploy their weapons closer to the brigade harbour area[221] to bring their fire within range. UNITA were unaware of the EO combat team's laager area to their immediate front.

Judging the distance to be less than 200 metres, Hennie despatched two small EO fighting patrols to locate the mortar positions. The BMPs were placed on high alert to give supporting fire if it was needed, but the crews were ordered not to start their engines for fear of alerting UNITA to the approaching patrols.

As they approached, the infantry teams realised that the UNITA mortar groups did not have a protection team. Silently stalking the over-confident mortar crews, our men crept closer and launched a surprise attack at approximately twenty metres. The 82mm mortars were immediately silenced and several UNITA troops were cut down in the first volley of fire. Others tried to flee from the surprise assault.

Hearing the firing to his front, Hennie ordered his vehicles to pursue the fleeing UNITA mortar crews at speed. The BMPs crashed through the bush cutting the retreating enemy to shreds with 30mm and AGS-17 fire. The heavy fire set the dry bush alight which made sweeping the area both difficult and dangerous. The survivors were able to scatter but at least 30 UNITA troops had been killed in the assault.

Nick Hayes stopped to remove an AK-47 from the hands of an apparently dead soldier who opened fire and Nick went down.[222] The rebel was cut to shreds as the other men opened fire on him with everything they had at their disposal.

With smoke from the bush fire drifting over the area and gunfire still raging around them, the ops medic and Nick's colleagues worked frantically to stem the bleeding from his wounds, stabilise him, and prepare him for casevac. Hennie immediately reported the

situation by radio. Carrying Nick with them, the men were eventually forced to withdraw from the area due to the dense smoke blanketing the area.

The Mi-17s responded to uplift Nick to safety with their usual speed and daring. He was casevaced to Saurimo for further stabilisation and then flown by Boeing to Olivedale Clinic in Randburg, but by then his condition had deteriorated.

Meanwhile, Brigadier Pepe de Castro's men were still under an intense 120mm mortar bombardment, now supplemented by B-10 and 23mm fire. Caught in the harbour area, some vehicles slowly and cautiously tried to make their way out of the area, keen to link up with Hennie's combat team and Mondoreal's forces despite not having been briefed on a sequence for exiting. The majority of the brigade, believing that their vehicles afforded them some safety, remained under UNITA's indirect fire.

Returning from an air raid on Cafunfu, Louwrens Bosch overflew Hennie's position in his MiG-23 and reported that he had been fired on by a 23mm anti- aircraft gun located close to where the EO combat team was positioned. Although his aircraft had not been hit, he had been able to plot the gun's position as point 1032 on the map.

Hennie assumed this position was being used as an indirect fire-control position because UNITA was still delivering accurate mortar fire into Brigadier Pepe's brigade movement from Firiquich.

Radioing Duncan to request an immediate air strike on point 1032, Hennie was relieved to hear that Pine Pienaar had already been scrambled from Saurimo and that his MiG-23 was on its way. Coming in at less than twenty metres above Hennie's position, Pine was given a bearing and distance to the target. Pine over-shot the position and rolled back for another look at point 1032. On his second run-in, he spotted a well-camouflaged truck. Assuming that it was a fuel bowser, he confirmed the target with Hennie and lined up for the attack.

One man later recounted what happened:

We were still two or three kilometres from the position Louwrens had identified and Oom Hennie had called for an air strike to take out the 23mm gun that had fired at Louwrens' MiG. When Pine arrived over the target, he was flying so low we felt the thrust of his giant turbines as he passed overhead. Hennie spoke to him on the radio and the next thing we saw was Pine coming in at a slightly higher altitude and letting fly with his rockets.

We weren't sure what he had hit but it was probably the largest explosion I have ever witnessed. The ground shook and leaves were blown off the trees. Shrapnel whizzed past. At first I thought Pine had been blown out of the sky because we saw shockwaves throwing his MiG around and he seemed to vanish into the fire and smoke of the explosion.

Seconds later we saw his aircraft emerging from the far side of the mushroom. Hennie spoke to him and he banked his MiG, climbed high into the sky and turned to head back to Saurimo. The explosions at the target area continued for some time.

Whatever it was his rockets had hit, he had certainly fucked up any nearby UNITA. And it certainly made the 23mm go quiet.

With his MiG low on fuel and rockets expended, Pine headed back to Saurimo, knowing he had obviously hit something very big. In his wake he could see a growing mushroom of black smoke, secondary explosions, and flames.

Hennie's men quickly advanced on point 1032, even as the secondary explosions continued. They needed to assault and occupy the position before any surviving UNITA could gather themselves.

Moving cautiously through the bush, the lead elements of the combat team reached point 1032 shortly before midday. Pine's assumption that he had hit a fuel bowser was soon proved wrong. His strike had obliterated a large ammunition supply dump.

Oom Hennie later told me:

> When I called for the air strike the aim was simply to take out what I assumed was a mortar fire control position. When Pine hit the target, however, I realised it was far more than that. After the initial explosions a dense pall of smoke obscured the target. When we got there we found the ground strewn with tons of unexploded ordnance—some of it HE [high explosive] shells for the B-10s, 106 rounds, mortars, you name it. They were just scattered all over the show. We found UXOs [unexploded ordnance] hundreds of metres away from the point of impact. These shells, damaged by the explosion, presented a danger to all of us. Close inspection revealed that there must have been at least three trucks loaded with ammunition. The UNITA crews, realising they were about to be bombed, must have taken cover under the trucks—at least, that's what we could determine from the remains we found. I think Pine must have scored a direct hit on at least one of the trucks. Amongst the wreckage we also found what seemed to have been a Unimog mounted with a B-10 and towing a ZSU-23-2.
>
> After Pine's attack, point 1032 should have been renamed something like point 1020.[223]
>
> The explosion was massive…and the area was still smoking hot.

To avoid the danger posed by the unexploded ammunition scattered around the area, Hennie's combat team withdrew after a cautious look at the strike location, and made a wide detour around the site of the blast. It was obvious that UNITA had suffered a massive loss.

Shortly thereafter, Louwrens Bosch was back overhead in a PC-7, hunting for another lucrative target. Flying over a village identified on the map as Muvuca, he spotted a large blue truck hidden in the bush and radioed his find to Hennie, who moved in to investigate the sighting. With Captain Mondoreal's combat forces following to give support, they reached the village in the late afternoon. Although they found nothing, Jos Grobler noticed fresh vehicle tracks leading into the bush. Hennie told Jos to follow them and radioed Roelf van Heerden to tell him they were investigating the area for possible UNITA activity.

Jos quickly found the blue truck. The infantry were ordered to debus and secure the area on foot while the BMPs followed to deliver fire-support if needed. Concerned about possible booby-traps and other unseen dangers, the men swept through the area cautiously.

Hidden under the trees they found a massive fuel, ammunition, and rations dump. They counted more than five hundred 200 litre drums filled with diesel (a commodity UNITA desperately needed) and found several long huts stacked from floor to ceiling with rations still in their original packaging cartons…canned sardines from Argentina, corned beef from France, and pork from Holland. It did not take much imagination to understand how UNITA had been able to procure such a sumptuous variety of imported foodstuffs. This logistics point had no doubt been established as a forward supply dump for forces attempting to delay and harass 16 Brigade's advance.

The forward elements of 16 Brigade, commanded by Roelf van Heerden, advanced out of the harbour area under fire from the dwindling mortar bombardment and finally reached the area where Pine had caused such havoc with his ground strike. Roelf, commanding the leading elements of 16 Brigade, radioed Hennie and told him they had swept the contact area where EO had decimated the UNITA 82mm mortar crews, picked up numerous UNITA weapons, and counted 36 dead in the vicinity where Nick had been shot.

As last light approached, Louwrens was back overhead in his MiG-23 with a mission to bomb the Lui Bridge and prevent UNITA from rushing in reinforcements and supplies. Shortly thereafter he confirmed having hit the centre span of the bridge with a 250-kilogram bomb which had destroyed the structure and dropped partial spans into the Lui gorge. This was no mean feat for a pilot using a dumb bomb[224] and flying an aircraft he had only recently been introduced to—in fading light.

It was dark by the time Hennie and Mondoreal established their temporary bases close to the newly discovered UNITA supply depot. Despite the Lui Bridge having been knocked out, the men believed UNITA might still launch a major counter- attack to recapture their supply dump during the night. It was a long night and the men stood by with weapons at the ready. They were exhausted from the actions of the day, but in high spirits. The only dampener on the day's events was the shooting of Nick Hayes. The expected counter-attack never came.

The next morning FAA rear elements conducted a thorough search of UNITA's supply dump and the area that had been subjected to Pine's attack. They discovered numerous underground bunkers and caches containing stockpiles of landmines, anti-tank rockets and projectiles, mortar bombs, and hundreds of thousands of AK-47 and PKM rounds. A loss of this magnitude would obviously impact seriously on UNITA's ability to continue supplying their delaying positions, their defence of Cafunfu, and indeed, even the war. There were obviously more such dumps but the vastness of Lunda Norte Province made it impossible to locate them.

Hennie was still convinced that UNITA intended to fight a series of delaying actions and that if they lost Cafunfu they would fight on with a war of attrition.

By 14 July Colonel Nevis' battle group was 24 kilometres from Cafunfu. Ahead lay several anticipated UNITA delaying positions where it was foreseen they would put up stiff resistance.

Shortly after sunrise that morning, 82mm mortar bombs and B-12 recoilless rifle shells began impacting east of their temporary bases. UNITA had apparently appreciated that

they would be farther east than where they actually were. Ignoring the heavy incoming fire, the brigade began its advance to the next strategic town of Fernandes, fourteen kilometres away.

An hour later, they entered another delaying position where they were once again engaged with intense mortar, anti-tank, heavy weapons, and small arms fire, but they were safely protected by the armour of their BMPs. With the dense bush shielding UNITA, the brigade forged ahead, firing blindly into the undergrowth. Mondoreal's combat team, moving on Hennie's left flank, was already engaged in bitter and heavy fighting. The sounds of heavy machine guns, RPG-7s and small arms fire filled the air. UNITA obviously held some advantages; they knew the area and had had time to prepare their ambush positions and withdrawal routes. The BMP crews, on the other hand, couldn't see through the bush and, because of their knowledge of the terrain, UNITA seemed to be everywhere.

Hennie called for an air strike and the two MiG-23s were scrambled from Saurimo. En route but unbeknown to Hennie, they were diverted to another target area. Still under intense fire, one EO BMP threw a track which forced its crew to dismount and effect repairs. UNITA, sensing the advantage the bush was giving them, opened fire at them with 14.5mm and 23mm guns, but miraculously their aim was bad.

Moving forward in tactical bounds and using speculative fire from their 30mm guns, the BMPs slowly ploughed through the bush. The incoming fire made it impossible for the infantry to debus. They had to sit tight while the BMP-2s manoeuvred their way through the contact area and cleared a path ahead of them with heavy automatic fire.

An EO combat team during the advance on Cafunfu (photo: unknown)

Having broken the back of what appeared to be a well-defended UNITA defensive line, the BMPs halted near the small village of Valodia. Miraculously, there had been no casualties. While the BMPs were being refuelled and ammunition replenished, Hennie and Mondoreal held a brief planning session. Due to the restrictive nature of the terrain, the combat teams would be forced to conduct a frontal attack on Valodia.

Hennie and Mondoreal decided on a fast mechanised attack on the town, hoping to exploit the shock effect of the BMPs and give maximum protection to the infantry.

Smaller UNITA ambushes en route to Valodia were quickly overrun and decimated.

An hour later as they entered Valodia under a heavy UNITA small arms, anti- tank, and mortar bombardment, the infantry leapt from their BMPs under cover of blazing 30mm guns and AGS-17 grenade launchers. Working in conjunction with the BMPs, the EO and Katangese infantrymen used fire and movement drills and advanced directly and unflinchingly into UNITA's fire while UNITA tenaciously clung to their positions.

Desperate for the air strike he had called for, Hennie radioed Duncan to find out what had happened to the MiGs. He listened incredulously as Duncan explained that the FAA had cancelled his air strike in favour of another series of targets. Hennie was furious: without air support they would have to fight their way methodically through Valodia on foot, supported only by their BMPs, making them vulnerable to direct and indirect fire. Nevertheless, they were determined to exploit the situation, maintain momentum, and seize their objectives. Numerous firefights took place around Valodia as the men assaulted and cleared UNITA positions. By the time the firing died down, UNITA dead lay scattered around the area.

By midday, Valodia had fallen and UNITA forces were in full retreat pursued by heavy gunfire. The only EO casualty had been wounded by rifle grenade fire.

While Nevis, Hennie, and Mondoreal reorganised their combat teams and finalised plans for an attack on Fernandes (their next objective) the men took a short break and had a quick meal, after which, vehicles were refuelled and ammunition replenished. Then it was back into action to clear the enemy ahead of their advance.

By mid-afternoon, they once again ran into a heavily defended UNITA delaying position on the approach to Fernandes.

Obscured by dense bush, UNITA threw a massive volume of fire into the approaching combat teams. Unable to debus from their BMPs, the infantrymen were ordered to fire from the rifle ports while the 30mm guns and the AGS-17 grenade launchers blazed away, clearing a path in front of them. The noise inside the BMPs was deafening as the men fired blindly into the thick bush surrounding them. Hot cartridge cases were soon scattered across the floors of the vehicles and the cabins filled up with cordite fumes.

Under intense counter-fire, UNITA soon disengaged and retreated in disarray, hastened by 30mm shells and AGS-17 grenades. Fernandes had been overrun and was now in the hands of the FAA.

One of the men later told me:

It was really hectic. Had we debussed, UNITA would have shot the shit out of us. It was scary because there were continual mortar explosions going off all around us and UNITA small-arms fire was smacking into the sides of our BMPs.

Sitting in the rear of the BMPs, we were blind to what was happening outside. We only knew that UNITA were firing at us like mad, determined to stop and kill us. We didn't need a second invitation when Oom Hennie gave us the order to fire through our rifle ports. We let rip, shooting at whatever was in front of our barrels. Hot cartridge cases were soon flying around inside the BMPs. Our throats were parched and burnt from the cordite

within the BMPs but we were too high on adrenalin to really feel the burn. We just had to fire and kill any UNITA in the path of our bullets.

When the cease fire came we were exhausted...but we were soon back at it again. We had no idea where we were. We just kept on firing through our rifle ports till the order to cease fire came. The 30mms and the AGS-17s had been blazing away the whole time. We were really tired—as in fucked. By the time we ceased firing Fernandes was in our hands.

We were now quite close to our final objective.

The combat teams had no time to stop and tally the enemy dead. Instead they forged through the village hoping to turn UNITA's withdrawal into a rout.

Circling overhead in his PC-7 and poised to deliver close support with rockets when called for, Pine Pienaar gave aerial feedback to the BMPs. Alberto, the next town on their advance route, fell by late afternoon but not before another intense firefight.

Cafunfu was now only seven kilometres away.

Exhausted and coming down from their adrenalin highs, the men knew that UNITA would probably make one last assault on their positions before daybreak. Preparing for a night that promised to be long and dangerous, the men dug trenches and, in between sentry duties, tried to get whatever sleep they could. The BMP crews worked ceaselessly at maintaining their vehicles, refuelling, and replenishing their ammunition for the assault on Cafunfu the next day. If UNITA attacked, they needed to be ready to launch an immediate counter-attack.

That night, Hennie radioed Duncan and asked for air support to be available at 13:00 the next day. He was still upset about his earlier call for an air strike having been overruled and wanted to make sure that he would have a PC-7 for aerial reconnaissance and a MiG-23 on call for close air support. He and Jos feared that UNITA would position their indirect weapons and direct anti-tank weapons on the western banks of the Cuango River and engage them with enfiladed fire as they approached Cafunfu. Duncan promised to make sure they would have their air assets on call.

Later that night Hennie questioned the two UNITA prisoners captured by the Katangese troops a few days earlier. They said UNITA had established in-depth defences around Cuango, 40 kilometres to the south, but not around Cafunfu.

It suddenly dawned on Hennie that UNITA had made a grave strategic appreciation error. The deception plan had succeeded and they had misread the advance on Cafunfu. Had the brigade followed the route UNITA had anticipated, the battlefield landscape would probably have looked very different. This error in planning would cost them dearly as they would have no time to reorganise their defences.

Later that night I debriefed a UNITA agent. I sent the information to Nic in a Strategic Intelligence Summary dated 15 July:

Against a background of great military pressure and the related logistical problems experienced over a wide front, UNITA's military staff is becoming anxious to sign a cease-fire with the MPLA. This will not only relieve the military pressure UNITA is facing, but provide them with an opportunity to consolidate their forces and equipment. Having

suffered serious recent military setbacks, UNITA's military staff will most likely be willing to accept most of MPLA's requirements for peace.

UNITA was readying itself for defeat. This made it imperative that Cafunfu be taken to deny them a cease-fire while they still held the diamond mining areas, and vital that they be dealt a crushing blow before the next round of talks in Lusaka.

With the FAA holding the initiative on the battlefield, it was also important that the assault on Cafunfu be conducted as soon as possible in order to maintain the momentum of 16 Brigade's push into Lunda Norte province. With its capture, the MPLA negotiators in Lusaka would find themselves in a position of strength which they would be able to exploit before they reached any agreement with UNITA.

It was clear that UNITA was reeling from the effects of 16 Brigade's advance. It was also becoming increasingly obvious that they could no longer rely on a well-oiled logistical supply system; they were running short of diesel, ammunition, medicines, and other supplies. This was destroying their morale and many of the Zairean troops in their ranks were deserting. In addition, sourcing materiel support from South Africa was becoming increasingly problematic.

An agent told me that a stunned silence had descended in MI as UNITA faced imminent destruction.

Nevertheless, DFA's press releases condemning EO's involvement in Angola were still being issued regularly, the media were still dutifully publishing them, and my phone never seemed to stop ringing, even in the early hours of the morning. I was close to exhaustion but could only think how tired our men in the field must be. I also knew that Lafras, Nic, and Duncan were having a very difficult time.

The men at Cabo Ledo and Rio Longa were still hard at work readying new FAA recruits to join the battle, but they were insulated from the situation developing around Cafunfu. Despite regular radio feedback from Saurimo, they really had no idea what the brigade was experiencing at the front.

Our logistical team in Pretoria worked frantically to ensure that our men were supplied with everything they needed to sustain themselves. This small group under Dries Hanekom's able and motivational command and leadership were in many ways our unsung heroes. No task was too big or too small for them and there was no such thing as a problem they couldn't solve; they approached every challenge with gusto. Dries' men comprised retired Colonel du Preez (Known as Oom Dup, who had been the commander of a unit I served in during 1975), Chris Toosen (Oom Toosie), my father Ebbie Barlow—himself a World War II veteran—and a few others. Some of these old-timers were in their seventies and the youngest were in their late forties. Our 'loggies' never let us down and they made a team that any organisation would have been immensely proud of.

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Sometimes a day can start badly, as Oom Hennie would later recount:

It was just before the break of dawn on 15 July—the day we were to attack Cafunfu. I felt my stomach telling me that I needed to get to a latrine. As was usual, we would find a secluded spot, dig a hole, do our business, and then cover it up. It was still semi-dark when I walked out of the laager area's perimeter. I met Paul Dittrich on his way back from having recently done his ablutions and he handed me a roll of toilet paper. It struck me that I was doing precisely what I had cautioned everyone not to do—I was not carrying my rifle—nor was I accompanied by a 'buddy' to keep a lookout while nature distracted me.

I saw what looked like a good spot and headed towards the clump of bush. I was about ten metres outside the perimeter when I noticed a UNITA cap bobbing along on the other side of a bush about two metres away from me. UNITA had, unbeknown to us, infiltrated the area and silently formed a sweep line in preparation for a predawn attack. They were already advancing towards our perimeter. I forgot about my grumbling stomach, flattened myself like a rabbit, and ran back to our perimeter—weaving like a guinea fowl.

UNITA opened fire at me. I recall one of our ex-32 guys—Gadhafi—standing at the fork of a tree and firing at UNITA—in essence giving me some covering fire— as I broke all speed records getting back to our laager area. As I was running, I saw UNITA's incoming rounds splintering the bark off the tree as UNITA fired at him. I got back to my vehicle and grabbed my rifle. By then, Harry, my gunner had clambered behind the BMP's 30mm gun and was firing at UNITA. With small arms fire and 30mm rounds heading towards them, UNITA called off the attack and withdrew. The front of my BMP was hit by so many incoming rounds it looked like it had chickenpox.

Paul, who had seen me on my way out to prepare my field toilet—but not seen my hasty return—was shouting "The colonel is dead! The colonel is dead!"

Soon thereafter, I was summoned to Brigadier Pepe de Castro's final coordinating conference where orders were to be issued for the attack. As I walked around my vehicle, another BMP, driven by Johannes (an ex-Koevoet member) came tearing through the bush, knocked me over, and then drove straight over me! Luckily, I suffered no serious damage—other than a bruised ego. With hot vehicle oil pouring over me, I thought there were better ways to start one's day.

Someone else later told me that, despite the seriousness of the situation, it had been extremely funny:

Oom Hennie came tearing into the perimeter followed by the dust cloud he generated as he ran. He had run so fast that his glasses were hanging askew from the wind his dash had generated. One of the guys was giving him covering fire from behind a tree as he made his sprint to safety. UNITA were really shooting at him but incredibly, they missed. I remember thinking that he looked like a cartoon roadrunner. I am sure even UNITA saw the humour in the situation. I was convinced that he would never again leave the perimeter, unarmed, and before first light, armed only with a roll of toilet paper.

Although I stifled my laughter—as I am sure everyone else did when they heard what had happened—it was a very grave situation and Oom Hennie could have been killed.

Imagine having to tell people he had gone to the toilet and never come back. They would probably have thought the food had killed him!

I later heard that he had been actually been run over by one of the Koevoet BMPs.

We swept the area UNITA had come from and found several RPG-7 launchers, rockets, and hand grenades, several of them white phosphorous.

The fact of the matter was, however, if Hennie had not felt a need to answer the call of nature, the UNITA force (later estimated by FAA to have been a company plus strength penetration force) would have walked straight into the laager area and caught everyone by surprise. UNITA had already prepared their RPG-7s and would have been able to decimate men and vehicles with small arms and rocket fire as the men were distracted by packing and loading their vehicles in anticipation of the day's movements and actions to take Cafunfu.

Hennie arrived at the conference in a decidedly bad mood. De Castro didn't believe that the earlier incident had been terribly serious, and accused the EO combat team of simply having fired at ghosts and shadows. That comment didn't improve Hennie's mood and it set the tone for the conference and orders group.

Hennie Blaauw briefing FAA commanders prior to the attack on Cacolo (photo: H Blaauw)

There were several heated exchanges between Hennie and Pepe who, despite knowing that the EO men had been fighting hard alongside Colonel Nevis and Captain Mondoreal's men, chose the moment to accuse Hennie's combat team of having delayed the advance when it had called for a casevac to extract Nick Hayes. Although FAA held its casualties in low regard, EO did not, and wounded men were casevaced as quickly as possible to get them to the medical staff at Saurimo.

Understandably furious—considering that the EO men had often borne the brunt of UNITA's fire and neutralised it for many days on end—Hennie managed to keep his temper in check, but only with great difficulty. He would later tell me:

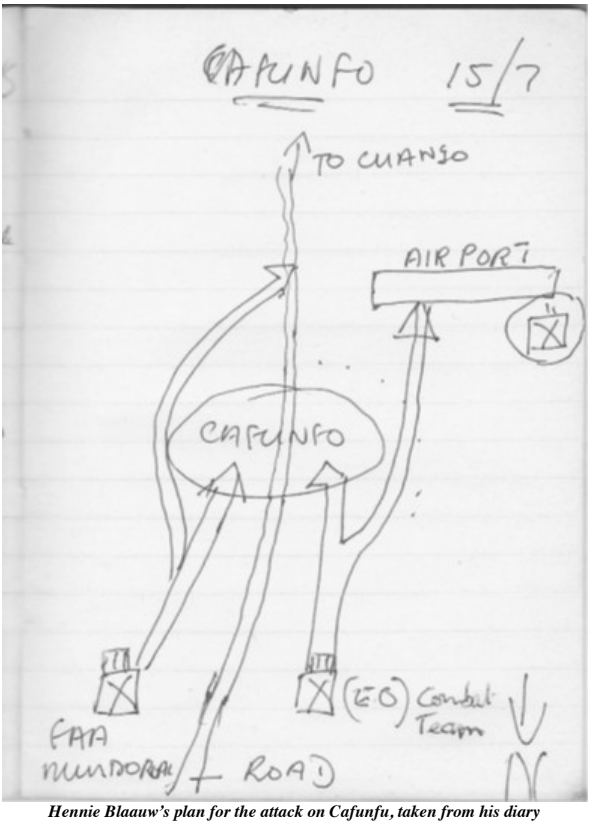
Pepe and I had numerous disagreements. We wanted the war to end. He wanted to score brownie-points with the politicians and general staff. To accuse us of having delayed the

advance was disingenuous to say the least. For days on end, we had led the brigade and engaged in countless gun battles—some of them major fights—while he remained in the brigade headquarters. I surmised that he was under pressure from Luanda to take Cafunfu and needed to deflect blame for some of his poor decisions.

Nevis and Mondoreal were equally surprised by his comment and said so. They also showed Pepe the RPGs and standard SADF white phosphorous grenades that had been collected after our fight earlier that morning. I wanted to 'bliksem'[225] him but knew I couldn't do so in front of his men. What the fuck did he know about what we were doing?

I will never look back fondly at him. He was a prize arsehole.

Once back with his combat team, a furious Hennie checked that his air support would still be available and on call. Duncan confirmed that the aircraft were fuelled and bombed-up, awaiting their orders to scramble. Hennie then ordered his men to prepare for their final push towards Cafunfu. Shortly thereafter a reconnaissance report indicated that UNITA was hastily evacuating Cafunfu. Their will to defend the strategic town had seemingly crumbled.



Hennie Blaauw's plan for the attack on Cafunfu, taken from his diary

Brigadier Pepe ordered Nevis' battle group to attack forthwith and destroy the retreating enemy troops. Hennie requested the air support earlier than anticipated, and the aircraft were scrambled.

The final approach and assault commenced at 09:00 on 15 July 1994. Moving slowly through dense bush and wary of possible ambushes, minefields, or strong points, the combat forces closed in on Cafunfu.

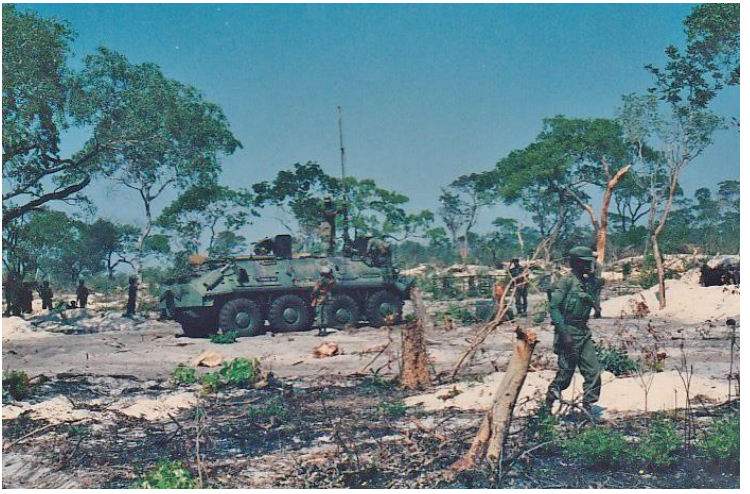
The final approach on Cafunfu (photo: H Blaauw)

Overhead in his PC-7, Louwrens Bosch reported heavy troop movements and concentrations near the town of Mona-Cafunfu, south of Cafunfu. He suspected that UNITA forces were withdrawing from the area.

As the brigade neared its final objective, Pepe deployed his D-30 artillery to Point 883. They immediately began registering possible targets in Cafunfu in case Nevis called for an artillery strike on the UNITA positions in and around the town.

UNITA troops on a South African Samil truck h
eading towards the front, Angola, 1993

A UNITA rocket strike on FAPLA positions (photo: Jim Hooper)



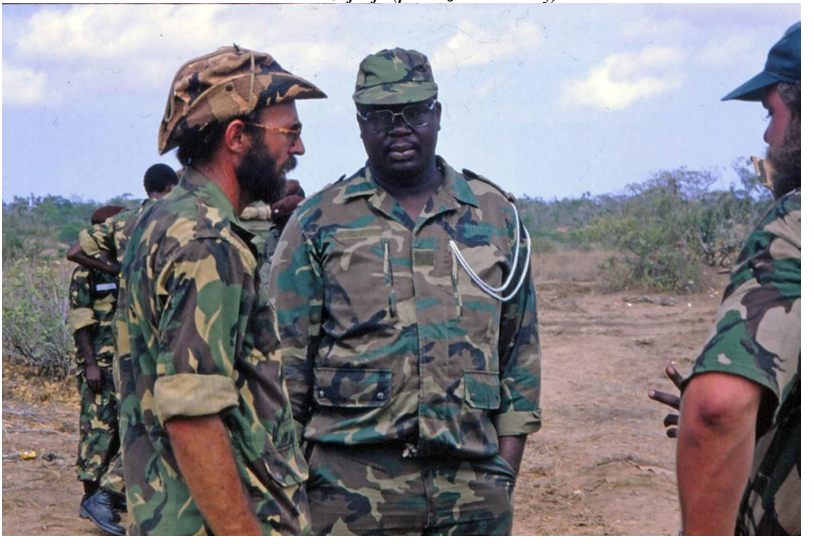
A UNITA BTR-60 (photo: Jim Hooper)

An Mi-17 in civilian livery at Rio Longa (photo: unknown)

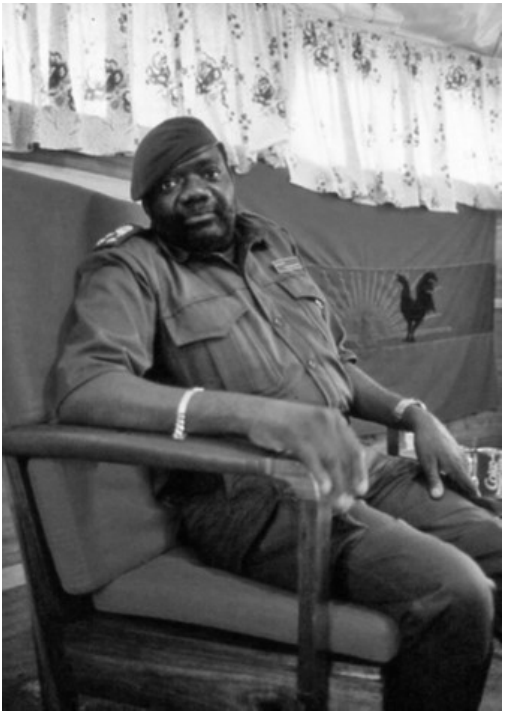
An unwanted visitor at Rio Longa (photo: Deon Rudolph)

An EO member lecturing FAA troops

Nick, Paul, and Ian on a training patrol at the coast near Rio Longa. Nic was later killed in action during the advance on Cafunfu (photo: James Findlay)



EO instructors discussing training with an FAA officer (photo: J Dempers)



Savimbi wearing his trademark Chinese uniform (photo: Jim Hooper)

EO instructors discussing training, Rio Longa (photo: Deon Rudolph)

Colonel Hennie Blaauw briefing Chippie Shaik while Chris Grove looks on. Rio Longa, 1994

An EO trained FAA sniper scanning the area (photo: unknown)

An EO BMP crossing a river (photo: Mynhard Heroldt)

Wynand du Toit with FAA officers, Cabo Ledo, Angola 1993

The author briefing FAA Special Forces Commandos on TTPs

An FAA combat team's BMPs forming up (photo: J Dempers)

An EO Mi-8 at sunset, Saurimo (photo: unknown)

EO Rapid Deployment Team, Saurimo,þ Angola, 1994

FAA Mi-8 on a hard standing, Angola, 1994 (photo: unknown)

James Findlay poses in front a an FAA T-55 at Funda (photo: James Findlay)

The beach at Cabo Ledo where the men spent many hours swimming and fishing (photo: J Dempers) FAA officers

FAA officers pose beside a BMP-2 (photo: J Dempers)

A BMP-2 with Battle Group A during the advance, Saurimo (photo: unknown)

An FAA BMP crew take a break under the shelter of a camouflage net (photo: Mynhard Heroldt)
A BM-21 preparing to deliver indirect fire support to Battle Group A on the advance on Cafunfu (photo: H Blaauw)

A weary-looking Roelf van Heerden during the second advance on Cacolo

An EO member prior to deployment (photo: Mynhard Heroldt)

EO men (James Findlay, Robert Hillhouse, and Nick van der Westhuizen) camoed up just before a patrol in the vicinity of Cacolo (photo: James Findlay)

Final coordinating conference between FAA and EO commanders prior to the attack of Cafunfu

EO BMPs advancing on Cafunfu, Angola (photo: Mynhard Heroldt)

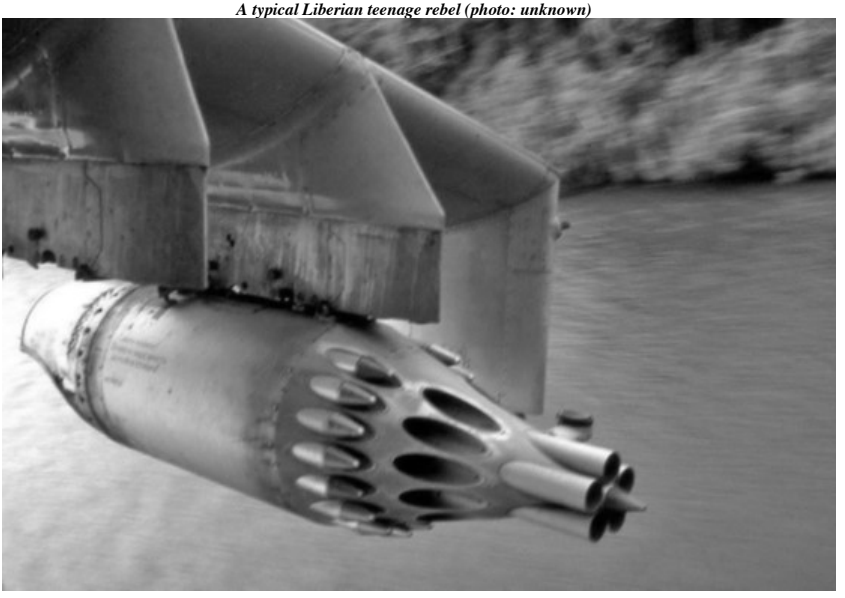
The 'cage' at Funda where where FAA kept their UNITA prisoners. UNITA POWs suffered numerous beatings by FAA (photo: James Findlay)

An EO Mi-17 departs Freetown for Koido (photo: Jim Hooper)

One of many skulls found at Soyo. Evidence that UNITA's tactic was to shoot unfortunate locals in the head if they refused to join the ranks (photo: unknown)

New African's cover, November 1995. With a little help from MI

A typical Liberian teenage rebel (photo: unknown)



An EO Mi-24's rocket pods waiting to be unleashed on RUF positions (photo: Jim Hooper)

EO BMP in Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

An Mi-24 gunship overflies EO positions in Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

EO Mobile Force on Patrol, Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

Mountains in Sierra Leone covered in jungle. This terrain offered the RUF numerous advantages (photo: unknown)

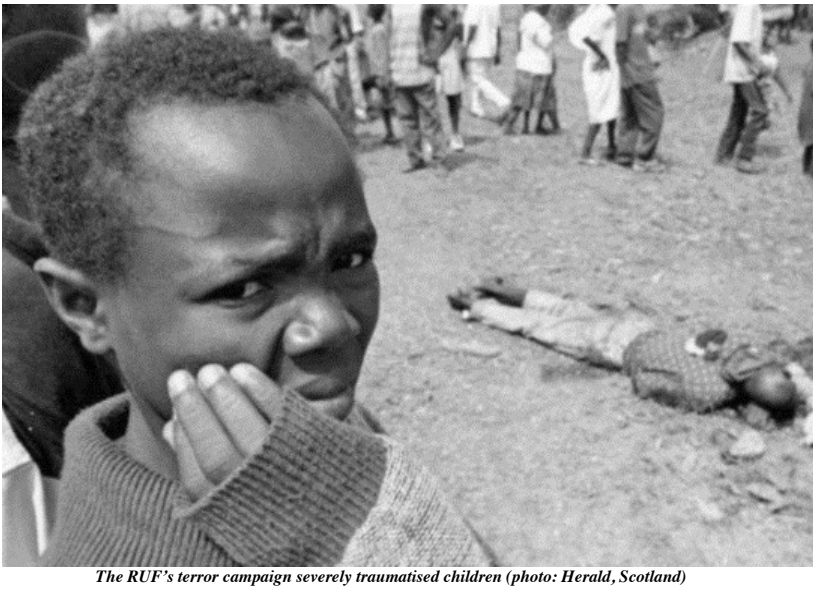
EO forces being resupplied by Mi-17, Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

The Mi-24 at Freetown, Sierra Leone (photo: unknown)

An EO mortar bombardment of RUF positions (photo: Jim Hooper)

An EO helicopter arriving to uplift an EO team, Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

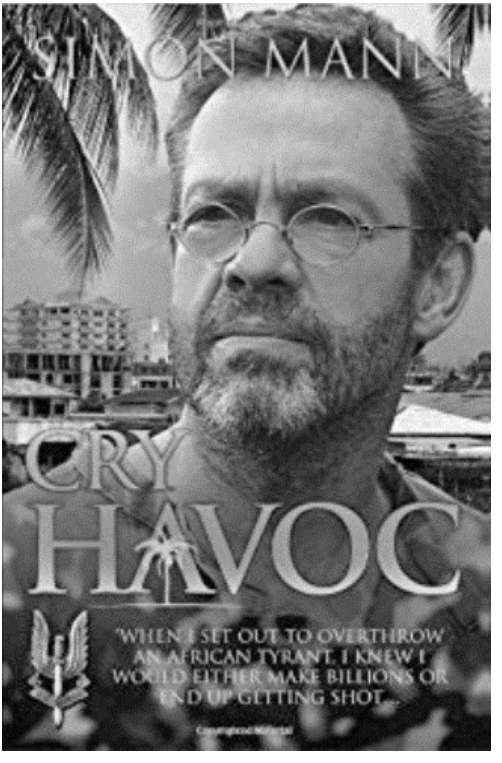
PP Hugo scans the jungle en route to an RUF target, Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)



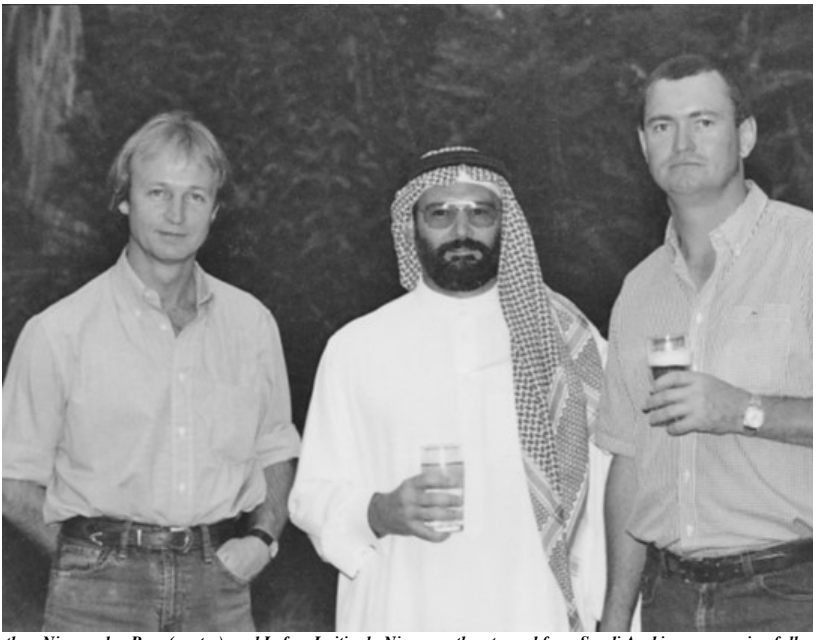
The RUF's terror campaign severely traumatised children (photo: Herald, Scotland)

Typical terrain, Irian Jaya (photo: Robert Harding)

The author cowboying in Montana, USA, 1998



Simon Mann who falsely claimed to have been the founder and senior member of EO wrote his own book after his failed coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea



Author, Nic van den Berg (centre), and Lafras Luitingh. Nic, recently returned from Saudi Arabia, was wearing full Saudi garb

Harry, one of the youngest EO members (left) and author reunited in 2017

The author—post EO—wearing the rank of Major General and listening to an intelligence briefing, Nigeria

Author officially becomes a member of Rooiplaas. Certificate handed over by one of author's 44 Parachute Brigade air assault engineers

Circling north of Cafunfu, Louwrens spotted a Land-Rover making an erratic dash down a road. Coming in low over the fleeing vehicle, he identified the distinctive red berets of UNITA's Special Forces and rolled in for an attack. After releasing his rockets, he radioed Hennie to tell him he thought the strike had hit home, destroying the Land Rover and killing the occupants.

By then, Papa Whisky, our King Air surveillance aircraft, had been scrambled from Luanda and was orbiting the area with its forward-looking infra-red (FLIR) system trained

on Cafunfu and surrounds. Unable to observe any UNITA activity, Papa Whisky relayed this encouraging message to Hennie and his BMPs.

As it approached Cafunfu, Hennie's combat team manoeuvred itself into an attack formation. They broke into Cafunfu with their 30mm and AGS-17s delivering speculative fire—hoping either to draw UNITA fire or suppress it. At the same time, Pine streaked overhead in his MiG-23, ready to provide close air support if called for.

Mondoreal's combat team broke into Cafunfu from a different direction closely followed by Nevis' combat team. By midday UNITA's resistance had crumbled and Cafunfu had fallen. Exploitation of the objective showed that UNITA was on the run.

Hennie and Mondoreal's combat teams quickly linked up and established defensive positions on the northern side of the Cafunfu airfield. Sometime later that day, 16 Brigade's HQ elements arrived and established defensive positions about two kilometres to the north of the town.

EO commanders taking a break after the capture of Cafunfu (photo: H Blaauw)

The town was quickly searched for any UNITA stay-behind units. There were none.

Surprisingly enough, apart from some inaccurate sporadic artillery fire, UNITA didn't launch a counter-attack that night. The men spent a quiet evening celebrating their victory drinking beer from one of the many UNITA shipping containers found in the town.

Hennie's situation report to Duncan gave the precise time of the fall of Cafunfu—13:15 on 15 July 1994.

The advance that had started on 21 April was finally over. As one of the men later recounted:

Taking and holding Cafunfu was an anti-climax for many of us. Most of the engagements had been intense clashes that lasted for some time. They had thrown everything they had at us, including the proverbial kitchen sink. We knew the strategic importance of Cafunfu—if we took it, UNITA were fucked as they would no longer be able to sell diamonds for kit so we were ready for a major punch-up. In fact, I had hoped

we would have a major punch-up as we had lost some good friends on the way—I wanted to give them the same. When they just gave up, I was quite pissed off.

Colonel Nevis' battle group had fought its way through numerous heavily defended lines facing countless ambushes, skirmishes, and stand-off bombardments. The enemy had suffered massive casualties and lost countless arms and other critical supplies. FAA and EO's relatively low casualty figures could be attributed to outstanding leadership, in-depth planning, correct use of air assets, and good discipline. UNITA, in turn, had lost hundreds of men killed and wounded, and countless UNITA troops had deserted. Others had fled to the safety of Zaire.

The loss of the Cafunfu diamond fields had also cost UNITA their primary source of income.

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As 16 Brigade consolidated their positions in and around Cafunfu, fighting patrols scoured the area for any signs that UNITA planned to launch a counter- attack. Defences were laid out, fields of fire cleared, and artillery and mortar DF and DF SOS tasks registered. Several small skirmishes took place but UNITA was thoroughly beaten and demoralised. The news that Cafunfu had fallen on 15 July 1994 was deliberately kept quiet by the FAA General Staff. Indeed, Nic van den Bergh was also instructed not to relay the fall of the area to South Africa, so I remained unaware of the victory 16 Brigade had achieved.

I therefore found it thought provoking when, on the morning of 15 June—before the final phase of the operation to capture Cafunfu had been put in motion, Rusty Evans, the Director General of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs, briefed certain selected journalists that Cafunfu had fallen. At that time, the combat teams were still massing and preparing for the final attack.

According to an agent, MI too was aware of the collapse of UNITA's defences in and around that town—and extreme anger was mounting against EO, FAA, the MPLA, and myself.

I only learnt that Cafunfu had fallen the following morning.

DFA and MI could only have accessed any intelligence from Cafunfu directly from UNITA themselves—something they continued to deny. UNITA must, however, in anticipation of its pending collapse, have informed them that they were about to be overrun and were abandoning their defences.

Lafras only gave me the news of Cafunfu's fall early on the morning of 16 July. Although I suspected that it would be sometime around mid-July, I had purposely been kept in the dark regarding the planned D-Day and timings for the final assault in case such information was compromised.

Not much later that morning, I was phoned by a journalist who wanted information about the fall of Cafunfu. I had never heard of her, but she seemed to know an awful lot

about me. She was also very well informed regarding the situation in the Lunda Norte provinces.

"How do you know that UNITA has lost Cafunfu?" I asked, as its fall had not yet been made public.

"I was told by Mr Evans' office," she responded gleefully.

"What else did those idiots say?"

"They said they are building up a dossier of all the crimes your company has committed in Angola and South Africa, and will soon be handing it to the Attorney General so he can prosecute. What's your response to that? Also, how much are you being paid in diamonds?" she wanted to know.

"Firstly, please ask your Mister Evans how he came to know that UNITA has lost Cafunfu…I only heard about it early this morning. He could only have received that information directly from UNITA. Secondly, ask Mister Evans—and his friend Mr Cleary—why they are so invested in UNITA holding onto the diamond fields which are a strategic asset belonging to the legitimate and UN-recognised Angolan government. They might even give you the scoop of the century if you ask them why South Africa's foreign and private business policy is so closely linked to diamond fields under UNITA's control. Thirdly, maybe you could remind Evans that I invited him to accompany us to Angola shortly after he commenced his numerous attacks on my company last year. Ask him why he refused."

"You're avoiding my question," she responded accusingly. "Will you publish my response verbatim?" I asked.

"Of course I will, unless you tell me it's off the record."

"My response, for the record," I said, "is as follows: Tell Mr Evans and his Foreign Affairs—as well as Mr Cleary—to fuck off," and hung up the phone.

Nico was aghast.

"You shouldn't have said that."

"Why not? Evans and his staff are merely civil servants who believe they are above the law. Cleary is a private businessman who makes his money deceiving people like the State President, multi-national corporations, and Savimbi himself. In fact, they have been above the law for too bloody long. It's time to call their bluff. If they want to lay a dossier before the Attorney General we will be given the opportunity to defend ourselves. Anyway, Evans is lying as usual—she won't publish my comment."

She didn't.

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Nick's doctors briefed me daily on his condition as they fought to save his life. I also regularly visited our wounded and sick in hospital to reassure them that once they had recovered, their posts in the company would still be available if they wanted to return. Morale among them was high and I recall their enthusiasm the day I told them Cafunfu had finally fallen. Several of them clapped hands and cheered in the hospital ward.

They were all proud to have been part of that historic operation.

Although UNITA had been convincingly beaten by 16 Brigade's two battle groups, it had not been destroyed. The war, however, had effectively been won by the FAA, and the MPLA government was now ready to continue its negotiations with UNITA in Lusaka.

UNITA, despite having suffered massive losses on the battlefield and considerably weakened, still had some fight left in it, as our men would discover in the coming days.

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As the media campaign in South Africa, the US, and Europe intensified, there were many others (including African governments and private business entities) who saw through these lies and were still keen to do business with us.

Frans Weigmans, the managing director of a South African geological and water exploration company (and husband to our secretary Daleen) had grown concerned about the chronic water shortages being experienced in Zambia, and asked if we would be prepared to work with them to establish a geohydrological company there. Frans was one of a rare breed of men who are passionate about water—locating water in drought-stricken areas and providing sustainable water solutions for impoverished communities was what he lived for. I was by then looking for ways to diversify our business operations so I agreed to get involved.

A few days later, Nico and I accompanied Frans and his partners to Zambia where we met the proposed local Zambian partners. During lengthy discussions and negotiations, we agreed on the company structure, the financing, the sphere of operations, the policy and procedures, and so forth.

Thus was born Aquanova Ltd. A few weeks later the first geophysicists left for Zambia with drilling machines and other equipment to commence operations.

"Just wait until the papers hear about this," I said to Nico, "they'll probably accuse us of trying to drill into Angola from Zambia so we can infiltrate teams of hitmen through the boreholes."

Pine Pienaar, an ex SAAF pilot who flew strike aircraft for EO (Photo Pine Pienaar)

19:
Tragedy in Lunda Norte Province

UNITA's defeat in the Lunda Norte Province, along with its loss of Cafunfu, heralded the closing chapter of the war in Angola. UNITA had suffered massive casualties and loss of materiel, and a huge blow to their morale and funding. The FAA—having regained the initiative on the battlefield—was placing UNITA under pressure in several other provinces. With FAA's momentum building, the povo had also lost their fear of UNITA rule and were, in many towns and villages, openly excited when they were liberated from UNITA's yoke of terror. They were also keen to provide FAA with intelligence on UNITA positions and movements.

If UNITA were forced to sign a cease-fire agreement and consent to a political settlement, the UN would at last be able to deploy peacekeeping troops and the country would finally come to rest after having exhausted itself in a civil war that had run for several decades. The UN only needed to ensure that UNITA didn't stray from its agreements and start building up its forces again. Not surprisingly, the UN was yet again unable to exploit the situation and, apart from the usual talk about peace and extending mandates, did nothing.

Shortly after daybreak on 16 July, helicopters flew into Cafunfu to deliver supplies. With fresh rations available, the men prepared for a feast and set about their daily routines, including maintaining the vehicles and equipment that had served them so well. UNITA continued to fire the occasional shell at Cafunfu but made little impression on the defenders. The two UNITA prisoners captured by the Katangese (who had been with Hennie's combat team for several days) were moved to Saurimo for in-depth interrogation.

The training programmes at Rio Longa were running smoothly, and from time to time, the FAA General Staff would visit to view—first-hand—what was happening on the ground. Lafras also gave me regular feedback on the training situation and told me that General De Matos had expressed satisfaction at what he had seen. He was also pleased with what he was hearing from the units the EO-trained recruits had been sent to. I got the same feedback from the generals when I visited them to discuss the unfolding views regarding Angola and the future UNITA government that South Africa was pushing for. The generals were still disappointed and shocked about the ANC-led government's apparent support for UNITA despite the years' worth of assistance the MPLA had given them.

Through his intelligence network (conversations with local communities, occasional sources, and radio intercepts) Carl Dietz had pieced together snippets of

While 16 Brigade was consolidating its position at Cafunfu, EO continued training FAA recruits at Rio Longa and other FAA bases

information that indicated UNITA was beginning to concentrate forces in the Lubalo area. Apart from being close to the Zairian border (over which supplies could be moved into Angola) Lubalo was only 35 kilometres east of Cafunfu[226] and also rich in diamond deposits.[227] A UNITA concentration at Lubalo also posed a significant threat to Saurimo's area of interest, something Duncan did not want in his own back yard.

On the night of 17 July, Papa Whisky, closely followed by an ever-present MiG- 23, was despatched to confirm or refute Carl's intelligence.

In the darkness the surveillance aircraft stalked the skies over Lubalo, its FLIR seeking out UNITA activity below. Behind the cameras, Gustav Retief scanned the area. It didn't take him long to locate a large concentration of vehicles and troops— an ideal target for the MiG-23.

Pine Pienaar was already orbiting his MiG above Papa Whisky, waiting to be fed target coordinates. They weren't long in coming. The information was also relayed back to Carl and Duncan at Saurimo. Flying through the black sky, Pine was able to confirm the target through his night vision-goggles and lined up for the strike.

He streaked in low, going supersonic as the MiG's afterburners kicked in, and released two 500 kilogram cluster bombs. It was too late for the UNITA troops on the ground to escape the mayhem that was about to erupt.

Watching through the FLIR, Gustav was able to confirm the strike. A dark patch of the Angolan bush was bathed in a terrifying flash as the bombs hit their targets and men tried to escape the shrapnel hell that had broken loose amongst them. Vehicles and ammunition, resultant from secondary explosions, created more chaos, casualties, and damage.

Gustav relayed his sighting information to Pine as the MiG headed back to Saurimo. UNITA's build-up at Lubalo had suffered a serious setback. A radio intercept later revealed, 'many, many troops have been killed and wounded and many vehicles destroyed'.

Similar sorties were flown on many nights with equally devastating results.

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Roelf van Heerden realised that Hennie and his combat team were exhausted and needed to be relieved as soon as possible. With the sudden let up of adrenalin, the continuous strain and tension of combat had started showing. Arguing that the sooner they were replaced the better, he assumed command from Hennie on his own initiative, absorbed the intelligence briefings, and started inspecting the vehicles and crews that would remain until the relief took place. Having been a technical advisor to Brigadier de Castro's HQ, Roelf was well aware of what Hennie and the men had gone through.

On 18 July Duncan flew into Cafunfu bringing EO reinforcements with him. He was surprised to learn that Roelf had already assumed command and handed the incoming EO men over for integration into the somewhat depleted combat team. The combat team that Roelf had long-since handed over to Hennie (after it had covered more than 1 000 kilometres—much of it cross-country, breached countless obstacles, faced deadly UNITA fire on a daily basis, attacked and destroyed UNITA defensive lines, and finally taken what was thought to be the toughest nut UNITA had to crack) was about to be given back to Roelf.

Hennie would later recount that during the advance on Cafunfu, they had faced more than 300 engagements with UNITA. Many of these contacts had not been small skirmishes, but large battles fought with heavy direct- and indirect-weapons. In many ways it was ironic: these men had achieved so much against tremendous odds with so little, yet there would be no drum rolls, medals or marches for them. Instead, they faced the wrath of the South African media. The Executive Outcomes combat team had suffered only four men wounded during this lengthy advance, of whom Nick was the one casualty still fighting for his life.

Oom Hennie paid tribute to the EO men who had fought with him:

I cannot describe the sense of pride I felt in these amazingly brave men. My crew commanders showed remarkable strength of character and they deserve the utmost credit for the manner in which they conducted themselves, almost always under fire, and at times debussing under massive fire to affect repairs to their vehicles—or as they once so courageously did—towing my BMP out of a tank trap.

Our small infantry contingent was outstanding and never hesitated to debus and close with UNITA to do battle under fire. They frequently leapfrogged forward using their fire and movement drills to join the FAA infantry in sweeping the enemy positions under withering direct and indirect fire. They never once hesitated, bitched, or complained—they just did the job. They were outstanding. I am proud to have commanded these brave men and would gladly do so again. Our pilots were phenomenal to say the least. They flew mission after mission for us, casevacing, delivering close air support, or bringing badly needed supplies. They continually flew through fire to bring us what we needed. Without them to support us, whether by chopper, MiG, or PC-7, we would have suffered much more at UNITA's hands.

During the night of 18 July, Johann Smith arrived at my office for debriefing— and to collect his salary. He told me that an MI front company known as 'Sonel'[228] was carrying out an intensive covert investigation on me. I had heard of Sonel, but asked who there was driving the operation.

"A guy called Helgaard Lombaard,"[229] he replied.

I had first met Helgaard Lombaard when he was a financial officer at the SADF's Chief Paymaster. He had later transferred to the Directorate of Counter Intelligence's counter-espionage division.

"So what's his problem?"

"He claims you are a British MI6 agent and that EO is a front for your espionage activities."

"Whatever will they think up next?" I laughed.

Smith gave me his latest intelligence product, most of which I quickly identified as disinformation and chaff.[230] Appreciating his double game, I thought it a great advantage to have him coming to my office to compromise himself on video; that was worth far more than the intelligence he produced. The chickenfeed he passed me included highly generalised statements and creative intelligence (the pressure that UNITA was experiencing on the battlefield, their logistical problems, and their low morale) that was general knowledge to anyone who remotely knew what was happening in Angola.

He did give me useful information about Sean Cleary's efforts to get us removed from Angola. As Cleary was a product of both the DFA and MI, this was hardly surprising. His weekly deliberate disinformation product titled 'Angola Updates', and the regular letters he penned to Anglo American's director, Peter Gush, made this abundantly clear.

MI's new investigation into EO and myself also made it apparent that they had ended up believing their own disinformation and they never seemed to lack the finances to launch operations against us.

I had assisted Helgaard Lombaard with a sensitive recruitment inside the US Embassy in Pretoria when he was a fledgling counter-espionage officer. I decided that if MI didn't stop pressuring me and harassing the company, I would start compromising their agents, and I would start with Cynthia in the US Embassy.

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While 16 Brigade continued its consolidation in and domination around Cafunfu, UNITA began to reorganise its units and move anti-aircraft weapons into position to prevent the brigade from being re-supplied by air. The helicopter pilots were subjected to anti-aircraft fire on a daily basis; they had to fly through a belt of 14.5mm and 23mm AA guns, then land on LZs that UNITA had registered with artillery fire. Regardless of the dangers, our pilots continued their hazardous missions to ensure that our men received their daily supplies.

Charlie Tait would later tell me:

It was pretty scary stuff. We never knew if we would make it to the LZ's to support the guys or if we would make it back to Saurimo. In the end, our fears for our own personal safety were overridden by the desire to make sure the pongos on the ground were okay. What else could we do?

UNITA reconnaissance teams monitored the flight paths of our Mi-17s as they left Saurimo and crossed the Luachimo River. These were then relayed to their anti- aircraft belt and artillery batteries, enabling them to prepare for the incoming Mi- 17s. The prize, as I had on numerous occasions been told by agents, was the downing of an EO air asset.

While our signallers were capable of deciphering large parts of these radio reports, they could do little but warn the pilots. The pilots did not have too many flight paths open to them due to fuel limitations on the helicopters. Once the helicopters were airborne and en route to Cafunfu, anxious hours were spent waiting for their return.

Fortunately, no aircraft had yet been shot down, but we feared it was only a matter of time. Despite the dangers they faced, the pilots retained their outward composure, believing it was their duty to assist their colleagues on the ground—even if they died in the process. They used every evasive tactic in the book and many that weren't.

On 21 July the Mi-17s were once more on a supply run to Cafunfu, delivering fresh FAA troops, ammunition, and other supplies. Circling above them was Louwrens Bosch in a PC-7, keeping a watchful eye for possible UNITA troop movements near the LZ. In addition, his mission was to locate UNITA artillery deployments and positions, and call in counter-bombardments from 16 Brigade's guns and mortars.

Louwrens Bosch (right) in conversation with an Angolan pilot shortly before he was shot down (photo: unknown)

Flying with him as an observer was Daniel Scheurkogel, the administrative officer at Saurimo. For many months, 'Skeeries' as everyone knew him, had attended every mission briefing and debriefing, listening to the pilots with wide-eyed admiration and awe. He had frequently pleaded with Duncan and Carl to allow him to fly on a sortie, but they had always refused, knowing the dangers the aircrews faced. Besides, as an untrained non-combatant he would be more of a hindrance than a help. Louwrens finally succumbed to

his pleas while Duncan was attending one of my planning conferences in Cabo Ledo. Skeeries was in a state of high excitement as the aircraft taxied out for take-off.

As the Mi-17s went in to land, UNITA's D-30 artillery began their predicted bombardment. Louwrens orbited the area trying to locate the dust and smoke of the guns so he could call in a counter-bombardment. He spotted a vehicle, strafed it with rockets, and immediately drew 23mm anti-aircraft fire. He turned back to locate the gun, but as he did so his aircraft was hit.

Carl Alberts, one of the Mi-17 pilots there, recounted the emotional moment to me:

> We always talked about the possibility of it happening to us—being shot down. We never thought it would happen until I heard Louwrens telling me that his aircraft had been badly hit and that he was going down. I cannot even begin to tell you just how fucking helpless we felt. All I could think of was to tell him to fly south, away from the UNITA concentration of troops.
>
> Arthur (Walker) and I, flying a resup[231] mission, were shitting ourselves—we knew that UNITA were dying to get their hands on us pilots.
>
> Juba (Joubert) and Sonny (Janeke) were monitoring Louwrens' transmission as well. We were all praying that Louwrens would manage a landing somewhere and that we would be able to lift him and Skeeries out of the area. There was no way we would leave them behind. We had to find them before UNITA did.
>
> I kept calling Louwrens on the radio, but there was only silence.
>
> I dropped altitude to start looking for Louwrens' PC-7 and UNITA let rip at us with 23mms and RPG-7s. I really thought we were going to be shot down next.
>
> Suddenly Louwrens came back on air and told me he had landed and that UNITA was closing in on him and Skeeries. I could hear the crackling of AK-47s in the background. Despite being in grave danger, Louwrens also tried to talk me away from UNITA's fire.
>
> Louwrens managed to talk me into his position and I came down fast. UNITA were by now closing in on him and Skeeries rapidly. I saw them running towards us through small arms fire and a cloud of dust just before landing hard. After that I couldn't see a fucking thing because of the dust and shit the rotors had kicked up. UNITA was firing at us from all sides and I thought it was the end for all of us. I suddenly felt the helo jerk as something hit the tail rotor, and realised that Louwrens must have run into it through the dust. The chopper started bucking and shaking itself to pieces as I tried to keep it in position. Skeeries hadn't appeared at all. I had no fucking choice but to leave the LZ.
>
> UNITA were close and firing furiously. I don't know how we did it but Arthur and I, not being able to wait any longer, clawed our way out of the LZ. Louwrens and Skeeries were lost. We couldn't do a damn thing. We had to abort our rescue. It was a fuck up. We had to leave. We had no choice. We were devastated.

With a large volume of UNITA ground fire directed at them, Carl and Arthur tried to fly their crippled Mi-17 as far away from the danger area as possible.

Racing ahead, Juba and Sonny looked for an LZ for the stricken helicopter. The Mi-17, badly damaged and smoking, staggered its way south. Finally, they spotted an LZ and

crash-landed their helicopter into it. Juba and Sonny raced in to uplift them, but before they took off, Carl caught a glimpse of the damaged Mi-17's tail rotor. The blades were bent and twisted and one had a section missing. Fresh blood confirmed their worst fears.

While Carl and Arthur had been trying to rescue Louwrens and Skeeries, Juba and Sonny had called Roelf on the radio and asked for immediate ground support. Roelf and his BMPs, already aware of the pending disaster, raced towards the crash site, guided by Juba. Fighting desperately through one contact after another they eventually reached the downed PC-7 and found only a pool of blood and marks indicating that a body had been dragged into a vehicle. There was no sign of Skeeries. Still under intense enemy fire and heavily outnumbered, Roelf and his BMPs were forced to withdraw from the area and fought their way back to Cafunfu.

Executive Outcomes had lost two more good men.

A cloud of depression descended over Cafunfu and Saurimo. Our men at Cabo Ledo and Rio Longa were stunned into silence by the news that Louwrens had been shot down and was probably dead, and that Skeeries was missing presumed captured.

Louwrens was a fearless fighter pilot who had undertaken numerous risks for his comrades. He would be missed by all. Skeeries, a well-liked non-combatant, had happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Many of the men wept openly.

When I received the news later that night, I felt like I had been punched in the gut. I too went into a depression and it wasn't easy to fight my way out of it. It was a terrible tragedy but we had to get on with our lives and think of the men still on the ground.

The press had a field day. Several journalists called me to gloat about the downed PC-7 and the loss of Louwrens and Skeeries. Some openly told me that we had got what we deserved, and hoped that we would lose more men to the 'Christians we were murdering'.

I seethed with anger listening to the boasts they made on UNITA's behalf. It seemed they were ecstatic about our loss. According to my sources, both DFA and MI were also jubilant. Nico and Daleen spent a lot of time trying to calm me down and divert my attention away from the media. My distaste for those who supposedly practised 'honest and objective journalism' increased daily.

Daleen Wiegmans often bore the brunt of the media's incessant phone calls

Most of the newspapers that reported our losses used the South African Press Association (SAPA) report which read as follows:

July 22 Sapa-Reuters: Angolan UNITA rebels say they have shot down a plane flown by South African mercenaries and captured the crew. UNITA said in a statement faxed to Reuters in Lisbon late on Thursday that the Swiss-built Pilatus PC-7 was downed on Wednesday over the eastern Lunda Provinces. The statement, signed by UNITA army chief Arlindo Chenda Pena 'Ben Ben', said the crew of the two-seater turbo-trainer had been captured, adding: 'We are holding these assassins'. It named one of the men as D Scheurkogel and gave the numbers on an identity card and a Durban University card. UNITA also accused the Angolan government of preparing an air attack on its central highlands headquarters. 'We have credible information that the enemy air force is preparing to attack homes of party leaders in Huambo from (Friday night) onwards', it said. An attack on Huambo would jeopardise peace talks which have been going on since November last year, UNITA added. Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola has been fighting a bush war against the ruling MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) since independence from Portugal in 1975. UNITA has accused the Angolan government of recruiting South African pilots and of employing more than 3 000[232] mercenaries including Namibians.

Despite the double tragedy, our men remained stoic and ready for whatever UNITA could throw at them. The pilots, having lost one of their own, never allowed themselves a moment's respite and continued flying mission after mission in support of our men and 16 Brigade. They too remained stoic.

A later Military Intelligence report referring to the deaths of Louwrens and Skeeries contained a grossly false statement aimed at further discrediting EO by attempting to portray us as ruthless criminals who had purposely murdered our own.

The report, submitted by their agent 'TB86' of Sub-Division Counter Intelligence (translated from Afrikaans) read as follows:

Lourens [sic] Bosch, an ex-SAAF captain, was in service of EO from January '94 until the time of his death on 22 July '94. He flew fighter aircraft in the RSA. For EO he flew PC-7s and MiGs.

Lourens Bosch was shot down by an EO team on 22 July '94. The reason was that he knew too much about EO and had become a risk. He made the mistake of talking about Angola while on leave in the RSA.

This report was directed to the South African Police Service and investigating officers called at my offices to question me about our involvement in the 'murder' of Louwrens and Skeeries. I was furious, to put it mildly, but could do nothing to prevent the ongoing flow of scurrilous disinformation and lies. The investigating officers, probably unaware of the smear campaign against EO, told me that someone at MI had been the source of the

report who had also requested an urgent investigation into EO's organised criminal activities. I was told that we were viewed in a similar vein to a major drug cartel.

I tasked every agent I was controlling in UNITA, as well as those in MI, to try to determine the fate of Louwrens and Skeeries and to locate where they were buried. We never discovered the site of their unmarked graves.

A UNITA agent later told me that they had been under continual pressure 'from South Africa' to shoot down an EO aircraft, preferably one of the Boeings conducting trooping operations. Aircraft flying EO and FAA support missions were second prize. He also reported that Louwrens' PC-7 had been shot down by a surface-to-air missile supplied by a South African known as 'Watson' and his brother 'Ronnie'. According to him, Watson had specifically supplied UNITA with a number of SAM- 7s 'to neutralise the EO aircraft' and obviously to force our withdrawal from Angola and incite public anger and condemnation towards us in South Africa. The agent did not think that Watson and Ronnie were related but they continually claimed to be family. They were, according to him, paid handsomely in diamonds for the missiles.

"Watson and Ronnie are very anxious to get you out of Angola," he said. "Why do we concern them so much?" I asked.

"If UNITA wins the war they'll be given many diamond and other concessions. They continually remind us of that," was his response. "We will soon be shooting down more of your aircraft—we got several SAM-7s from Watson and Ronnie," he warned. I immediately passed the agent's statement to Carl Dietz and told him to warn our pilots accordingly. He did.

I had long since stopped believing that the South African Defence Force had ever been in Angola to stem the 'Red Tide'. The constant claims about fighting to stop the spread of communism had been, in my opinion, a lie designed to protect the personal economic interests of government ministers and big business. They would have stopped at nothing to achieve this; SADF soldiers had merely been pawns used to secure their interests and Executive Outcomes now stood in their way. The lengths the South African government was willing to go to to help establish a Maoist state in Angola were truly astonishing.

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More tragic news followed. On 25 July, Olivedale Clinic called and informed me that Nick Hayes had finally succumbed to the gunshot wounds he had sustained on 13 July.

Sick and wounded EO men were medevaced to Olivedale Clinic (photo: Randburg Sun)

On 28 July, Juba and Sonny Janeke as co-pilot in one Mi-17, and Carl Alberts and Arthur Walker in the other, lifted off from Cafunfu and climbed to orbit the area. They had just dropped Carl Dietz who was doing an on-the-ground intelligence assessment of the prevailing situation. None of them were particularly concerned about imminent dangers; FAA intelligence had assured them that UNITA had withdrawn the anti-aircraft elements operating around Cafunfu. On the other hand, an agent had just notified me that UNITA had received instructions to down more EO operated aircraft.

On the ground, Roelf and Carl Dietz had barely shaken hands when they saw the trail of an SAM-7 streaking up from the bush and locking-on to Juba's Mi-17. They watched in horror as the events unfolded.

Carl Alberts and Arthur Walker were flying below and behind Juba, and they saw the missile slam into his helicopter and explode. They watched helplessly as the machine, trailing a plume of smoke, spiralled out of control and fell rapidly towards the ground. They hoped against hope that they weren't about to witness a tragedy similar to that which had befallen Louwrens and Skeeries.

The stricken helicopter slammed into the ground in a great cloud of dust and debris. Seconds later, Juba calmly asked for an extraction over the radio. It was only his exceptional flying skills that had gotten them onto the ground alive. Carl and Arthur immediately took their Mi-17 down and plucked Juba and his Angolan colleague aboard. Miraculously both were uninjured, but it had been a narrow escape.

Carl later recounted:[233]

I swung the aircraft around and watched Juba slam down in a cloud of dust. It hadn't settled when a familiar and calm voice came through my earphones: "Carl, please come and fetch us."

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At the end of July, Colonel Nevis, the commander of Battle Group Alpha, led a small mechanised fighting patrol out of Cafunfu. Its aim was to locate and engage any UNITA

elements they could find. Returning from their patrol, the vehicle Nevis was travelling in detonated an anti-tank landmine and Nevis was flung from the vehicle. He died instantly. His death was a shock to everyone who knew him, especially as he had fought alongside EO on the entire 16 Brigade advance and had proven himself a brave soldier and a good leader of men.

Oom Hennie later told me:

Nevis was a good man. We didn't always agree on everything but he was willing to listen and adjust his plans if we could convince him to do so. He never sat back and waited for his men to execute the orders he had given—he led from the front. He was in many contacts with us and never once did he try to withdraw. When Pepe (de Castro) falsely accused EO of having delayed the advance, Nevis openly supported us and stated the contrary. His death was a loss to FAA. He would have made a fine brigade commander.

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Mike Herbst and his team had by then completed basic training for the home guard at Cacolo. Mike had his reservations and doubted the unit would be able to withstand a ferocious UNITA attack without EO control and support. He opined that UNITA would launch another counter-attack against Cacolo once they discovered the EO training team had withdrawn. Despite his warnings, the FAA General Staff ordered them to redeploy back to Cabo Ledo and Funda to continue training fresh FAA troops. Mike was equally concerned that the clinic they had established at Cacolo would be neglected, which would again leave the locals without medical support. Although his protestations fell on deaf ears, his misgivings proved correct.

An EO helicopter resupplying Mike Herbst's small force at Cacolo (photo: H Blaauw)

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On 2 August I was given information by an agent who had gained access to UNITA's Political Congress:

During the period 25 to 27 July, UNITA held a special political congress in Huambo attended by all political leaders as well as several headmen from the organisation. The aim was to give attention to UNITA's future strategies regarding continued negotiations with the MPLA and the current military situation.

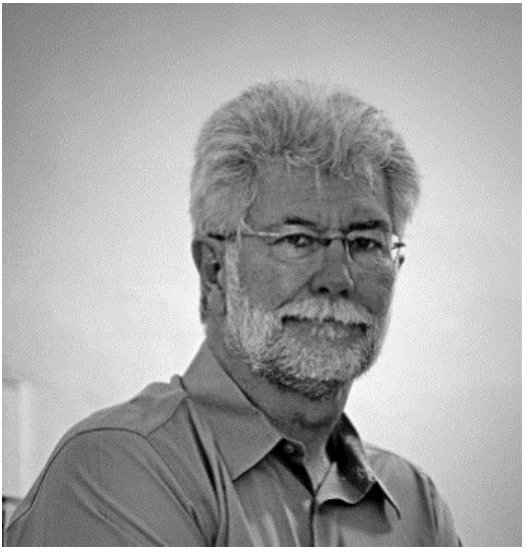
Apart from the normal decisions that UNITA had to make, it was decided that a cease-fire should be negotiated with MPLA as soon as possible. Concern was expressed about UNITA's logistical position and it was clear that major efforts would have to be made to rectify this. The sudden loss of Cafunfu had come as a major shock and it had a negative and detrimental effect on UNITA's operational planning and military position.

The agent told me that UNITA's political commissars had levelled recriminations against their military commanders and expressed anger and concern about the loss of Cafunfu. The military commanders, in turn, had accused the political commissars of being out of touch with reality.

He also reported that the mysterious Watson was struggling to supply certain kinds of weapons, especially anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. I desperately wanted to identify Watson and his so-called brother 'Ronnie'—I had matters I wanted to sort out with them.

On 3 August the Department of Foreign Affairs again lied in a press release at an international forum. The lie was picked up by countless journalists and again the media went to town. Under the headline, 'Pretoria wants to prosecute Angola mercenary firm', Brendan Boyle[234]—acting as the DFA's useful idiot—reported:

> The South African government wants to prosecute a Pretoria-based company that recruits mercenaries for the Angolan civil war, a senior official said on Wednesday. 'I think we are on the verge of closing them down', Director General of Foreign Affairs Rusty Evans told reporters after a meeting'... the operations of EO were bedevilling regional peace efforts and appear to be in flagrant violation of a two-year old South African law ... EO is bad news. We have to come down on them. I just cannot accept that there are about 500 South Africans fighting in Angola', he said, adding that the government had asked the Justice Department to prosecute the firm.



Journalist Brendan Boyle acted as DFA's useful idiot
(photo: Daily Dispatch)

Like many of the journalists who had blatantly lied about EO, Boyle didn't even make the effort to establish the veracity of his own report.

Earlier Evans had told a multi-party committee that South Africa was actively engaged in bringing peace to Angola after nineteen years of civil war between the government and rebel leader Jonas Savimbi's UNITA.

Referring to EO's involvement in Angola he had said, "We have put it to the Justice Department. They have put it to the Attorney General. I think there must be a strong prima facie case that this operation contravenes South African law."

Evans' comment about South Africa actively being involved in efforts to bring peace to Angola was laughable. South Africa had been actively involved in destabilising not only Angola but also Rwanda and Burundi, and other parts of Africa, by arming so-called anti-government or liberation forces. Moreover, men well known to Evans were still supplying UNITA with weapons via South Africa's Armscor parastatal. Falsely accusing EO of having acted illegally was another attempt at deflecting interest away from their activities.

The timing of his statement, so soon after it had become known that UNITA had lost the diamond fields of Cafunfu, and suffered a serious setback at Lubalo, was also an indication of his agenda. His claim, 'I think we are on the verge of closing them down,' made Evans' own intentions clear, and peace was certainly not among them.

Several journalists called me and claimed that Evans had boasted about a dossier that DFA had compiled on EO. He had informed them that this would form the basis of a detailed and in-depth investigation into the company—and its closure.

According to them, Evans had reiterated that we were 'bad news'. He did not consider the movement of supplies and men to UNITA—or the covert flow of arms and ammunition to Rwanda and Burundi aimed at destabilisation and genocide— in the same vein and this issue was never raised by his department. Nor did he comment on the illegal smuggling of diamonds and ivory from Angola to South Africa. The intelligence services were specifically tasked to intensify the collection of information on Executive Outcomes and apparently not on those who were supporting UNITA or other forces intent on destabilising Africa.

I asked Wilna Lubbe, our attorney, to test the validity of Evans' statement and determine the Justice Department's thoughts and intentions. She contacted them by phone and they denied all knowledge of any such dossier or complaint registered against EO. In fact they had never heard of any such case. Evans had, once again, proved himself to be a blatant liar. I wasn't surprised but I was astonished that, as the director of the Department of Foreign Affairs, he was never taken to task on his lies and deception.

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At 04:00 on the morning of 8 August, I debriefed a UNITA agent and was told about a new 'special plan' UNITA was about to implement in South Africa.

Apparently, UNITA (with support from MI and the DFA) had brought a 'special team' of between ten and fifteen men into the country. Their mission was to eliminate me, destroy our offices at Danny Street, and remove whatever personnel files they could lay their hands on. The files would be used to determine the names and addresses of our members and enable MI to 'disrupt' their families. The team was staying at the Ambassador and Europa Hotels in Johannesburg. According to the agent, they were armed and awaiting instructions.

This information, coming so soon after Rusty Evans and Foreign Affairs' false allegations, struck me as something more than just gossip. If a UNITA hit team had indeed been despatched, I certainly had to pre-empt any action they were contemplating. Lafras and Nico would also be high up on UNITA's list of targets.

I told Nico that I planned to lead a small team to raid the hotels where the UNITA teams were allegedly staying. I believed we would catch them by surprise if we conducted the raid between 03:00 and 04:00. If they tried to resist we would simply shoot them at the hotel. If UNITA wanted to extend their war into South Africa I would not disappoint them. As MI's DST had already established a close link between UNITA and Inkatha's Caprivi-trained men, they had already brought the war to South Africa.

Nico argued against my plan and suggested it would be wiser to report the matter to the police.

"All they will do is warn UNITA," I responded. "My agents in the SAPS have already told me that the police are turning against us."

After much debate, I finally accepted Nico's approach and phoned Major Roos of the police's Counter Espionage and Crime Intelligence Unit. I wanted to ensure that the SAPS was officially aware that we knew a UNITA hit team was in the country. An officer was sent to discuss the matter with me.

Major Andre van Taak arrived at our offices later that morning. He listened to my story with obvious disbelief, so I arranged for him to meet and debrief my UNITA agent. I controlled the meeting and was present—standard practice when introducing someone to an agent under one's control. I didn't know a thing about Van Taak and I had no intention of compromising my agent with him, so the agent wore a balaclava.

He gave Van Taak the same statement he had given me. On 9 August I also provided an affidavit containing all the information I was aware of.

"You have done the right thing," Nico said afterwards. "But you don't trust him, do you?"

"I certainly don't," I responded bluntly.

I was not at all surprised when, a few days later, Van Taak phoned to say the UNITA men had quietly left the country. He offered no explanation as to what they had been doing in South Africa or why they had left. Nevertheless, his call confirmed the agent's information—and reaffirmed my distrust in the SAPS and Van Taak.

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On 22 August Cacolo fell to a major UNITA assault. The home guard, unable to withstand the large UNITA attacking force, broke ranks and fled into the bush. Those who couldn't escape in time were captured and systematically butchered on the road. The same fate befell civilians who were randomly accused of collaborating with EO. Some were burnt alive—others hacked to death. The hard work that Mike and his team had done to bring a semblance of security to Cacolo was destroyed.

UNITA had returned and reinstated its rule by fear.

On 26 August UNITA issued a General Staff communiqué in the name of UNITA's chief of staff, General Arlindo Chenda Pena 'Ben-Ben', saying they had successfully attacked Cacolo:

The Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA) General Staff would like to bring to the attention of national and international public opinion that after eight hours of fighting on August 22 FALA captured Kakolo. This is the only support base for the MPLA offensive against Kafunfo, Lunda Norte Province. Eduardo dos Santos' forces suffered 73 confirmed fatalities. The rest of the garrison was pushed into a mine field, that they had laid themselves, where a large number agonized until they died.

FALA captured: four 76mm cannons two 23mm cannons one D-30 cannon
two 120mm mortars six 82mm mortars
ten 60mm mortars
nine RPG-7 rocket launchers seventeen light machine guns
151 new Soviet-made AKM assault rifles eighteen South African-made R-5s[235]

Six cargo trucks
Three warehouses filled with weapons
Large quantities of Portuguese-made combat rations A large amount of oil
This resounding defeat of Eduardo dos Santos' forces represents the beginning of the end of another bellicose adventure.
General Arlindo Chenda Pena "Ben-Ben" Chief of Staff
August 26, 1994

Ben-Ben was somewhat sparse with the truth. The gun battle had, according to the survivors, lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. His comment about the FAA having suffered 73 casualties was a lie. Cacolo had been defended by the home guard, made up of civilians trained by Mike Herbst's EO training team—not the FAA. There were no minefields laid by the defenders. The list of so-called equipment 'captured' was wishful thinking.

UNITA General Ben-Ben (photo: unknown)

Given the terrible atrocities the home guard had suffered at UNITA's hands, the communiqué astonished us. Little did General Ben-Ben realise that we would soon return and retake Cacolo.

The minutes of our weekly management meeting (regarding training) held at Cabo Ledo on 11 September reported as follows:

Training has progressed well. FAA Force has dwindled to ± 160. List of kit required for training to be supplied to Brigadier [Nic] van den Bergh. General Faćeira has requested another cycle of training for ± 2 000 troops at Longa commencing week ending 16 September 1994. Those members of FAA who have completed the training courses will be issued with certificates of competency. When the current training has been completed a company of men will be provided to support the EO's BMP group.

Military Intelligence began giving 'detailed briefings' regarding our deployments in Angola. They claimed we were operating in Lubango, Huambo, and Uige and had a

presence in the Cabinda Enclave. Their lies (which were lapped up by the media) and incompetence didn't surprise me.

My Strategic Information Summary of 20 September reported:

UNITA's current military position is deteriorating on an almost daily basis. The greatest problems currently are:

- Logistics: This is still a major problem for UNITA, especially diesel, medical supplies, artillery and mortar ammunition, and anti-aircraft ammunition.
- Morale: UNITA units are experiencing grave morale problems caused by:
- Shortage of supplies.
- Lack of equipment.
- FAA's increased operational success.
- FAA's night flying operations.
- The poor situation of UNITA supporters in rear areas.
- Lack of progress at the negotiation table.

Comment:

UNITA can be expected to try and brush up their operational image by conducting operations against civilians and other soft targets. Such actions will be blamed on the FAA and EO.

Strategic Intelligence Summary No 075/94, dated 6 September 1994, illustrated their position:

UNITA currently find themselves under increasing isolation on an international level and have decided to escalate their propaganda activities in:

- England
- USA
- Portugal
- France

UNITA also plan to make maximum use of the planned meeting between Pres Mandela and Savimbi in order to gain international credibility and use Mandela to help in forcing Executive Outcomes out of Angola.

During early September we took a group of journalists to Rio Longa to view a scheduled FAA battalion exercise and recruits undergoing basic training. We wanted to show first-hand that we were not training 'ANC hit squads' as they had proclaimed.

Their behaviour while on this trip was shocking, to say the least. They seemed more interested in how much free alcohol they could lay their hands on than in ascertaining what the true state of affairs was. Many of them, totally drunk, had to be helped into their beds at night by the very men they were slandering. I was disgusted.

It was obvious the journalists didn't believe what we were telling them. Thinking that a briefing from the FAA's most senior intelligence officer might steer them toward the truth we arranged for General Itha to meet with them against his better judgement. Several journalists, still reeking of alcohol, were openly hostile towards the general, accusing the MPLA and FAA of being warmongers and insisting on describing UNITA as a 'Christians-for-peace' force. Itha grimaced at their obvious lack of knowledge of Angolan politics and indeed of UNITA, but politely maintained his composure, although with some difficulty. Nic van den Bergh and I cringed with embarrassment at their attitude and behaviour towards him.

Itha provided them with precise details of illegal over-flights and the registration numbers of aircraft that were supplying weapons, ammunition, and other equipment from South Africa into UNITA-held territory.

When I later read newspaper reports describing the visit, I wondered if Nic and I had been with the same group. Their reports certainly didn't reflect what we had seen and heard.

In her 18 September 1994 Sunday Tribune article, Peta Thornycroft briefly mentioned Itha's comments but negated them by saying, 'However, the allegations of continuing South African involvement with UNITA is an old story, and one which so far has not been proved conclusively'.

Her comments about the FAA-battalion exercise were equally baffling:

> The Sunday Tribune watched a military exercise last Friday. Several hundred young conscripts, some of them more or less press ganged into the army, attacked and destroyed the 'enemy' using about R300 000 worth of Russian armoury. The South Africans had designed the exercise and mapped it out with Angolan officers. When the order came for the battle to begin, South Africans on a hill with radios gave the order for the barefoot soldiers to begin shouting their morale-boosting battle cries, and to begin firing the mortars.
>
> The weaponry screeched, zinged and exploded around us...The young men, drenched in sweat, with eyes flashing with excitement, were going into the real war two days later. Then they would get uniforms, and might get to sleep in proper tents, instead of their present barracks, the open veld.

I could only shake my head in amazement at how deceptive she had been.

FAA recruits taking a break from training, Rio Longa, Angola 1993. The South African media was highly critical of these troops (photo: unknown)

The truth, which had been explained to all the journalists present, was that everyone but the newest of recruits had been issued with a uniform. Those not so equipped were still in the process of being evaluated (regarding their suitability to remain in the military). They would not be issued with uniforms until they were declared fit and healthy, and had completed their basic training. There was no question of such recruits suddenly being thrust into battle. The journalists had also inspected the more senior recruits who were close to completing their final evaluations. Most had come from primitive tribal backgrounds and many had never worn shoes anyway, so doing their initial training barefoot was no hardship. There was also a war on and the FAA was experiencing many logistical difficulties, even as far as basic equipment was concerned.

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Remembering statements that Foreign Affairs had made to the media concerning their dossier on EO and their intentions to close down the company, I again instructed our attorneys to follow up the matter with the Department of Justice.

On 5 October, Wilna Lubbe wrote to the Office of the Attorney General, asking for clarification on the disparaging comments Director General Evans and his Foreign Affairs Department had made to selected journalists. To my fury, these unfounded comments had been picked up by international journalists and widely published abroad as fact.

Her letter, translated from Afrikaans, read:

With reference to our telephone discussion with your offices, we confirm that we are acting on behalf of Executive Outcomes.

According to articles in The Citizen and The Star of 4 August 1994, the spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs declared that a dossier concerning our client's activities in Angola was submitted to your office. Our client has not been approached by any investigating officer. They would like to offer their assistance but are not in possession of any further information.

Our client wishes to obtain the following information from you:

1. Is the office of the Attorney General currently busy with such an investigation?
2. If so, who laid the charge and what is the charge?
3. Who is the investigating officer, what is the MAS number and which police station or division of the SAP is conducting the investigation?

Unfortunately, we have no further information in our possession. We thank you in advance for your prompt reply in this matter.

The Attorney General replied personally on 11 October and signed the letter himself:

No dossier concerning your client is in possession of this office for investigation or decision.

This of course, merely substantiated what we already suspected. In pursuit of his own agenda and that of some cabinet members, powerful business corporations and people, the Director General of Foreign Affairs was making false and malicious statements to discredit a private South African company that had a legitimate contract with Angola's legitimate government.

Lacking access to journalists who were prepared to bring balance by telling our story objectively (in contrast to official South African government releases) there was no way we could defend ourselves. Tony Buckingham suggested that if no one in South Africa was prepared to listen to the truth, I should state our case to the Americans. Both Lafras and I believed that Buckingham was far enough removed from the day-to-day nonsense we had to put up with to be able to view our situation dispassionately and thought his suggestion a good one.

Author in Washington DC a few days before being asked by US government agents to leave the country

Using his considerable network of contacts, a mutual friend of ours, Jaq Migeotte, made appointments for us to meet officials in the US State Department, senior officers in the Pentagon and the CIA, and US Senators and Congressmen. The appointments were confirmed by Jaq before we left for Washington.

The visit turned out to be a complete disaster. Shortly after Lafras and I arrived in America, Jaq told us that South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs had told the Americans not to speak to us—the scheduled meetings had been cancelled. When we contacted those who had agreed to see us, their message was the same: 'We cannot talk to Executive Outcomes—not even off the record'.

We were astonished that the DFA had gone to such lengths to gag us, and astounded that the Americans had so meekly complied. We decided to investigate the situation.

As Tony Buckingham had asked me to keep him informed, I wrote him a letter on 13 October:

Due to the US State Department's instructions, which have effectively put a total ban on us, all our scheduled meetings have been cancelled. We were told (and we have a telephone voice recording to prove this) that the SA embassy in Washington and the Director General of South Africa's Foreign Affairs Department were instrumental in this attitude having been adopted by the State Department. The Dept of Foreign Affairs (SA) has also told the US State Dept that Executive Outcomes is a destabilising factor in Angola and a threat to regional security. Also, the State Dept wants both the MPLA and UNITA to collapse completely and then to form a Govt of National Unity. Due to the above situation we were only able to meet:

- Richard T. Lyons, an advisor to the World Bank.

- Walter B. Lohman, legislative assistant of Senator J. McCann (Rep).

Frustrated and disappointed about having been unable to state the true situation, we brought forward our return to South Africa. Lafras left earlier than I and he phoned from the airport to say that he had been apprehended and intensively interrogated by security staff before having been allowed to leave. I could expect much the same treatment.

A short while later there was a knock on my hotel door. Looking through the peephole I saw a uniformed police officer and someone in plain clothes. Assuming the latter to be an FBI agent, I opened the door.

"Are you the man from the Washington Post?" I asked.

Somewhat taken aback that I was expecting a journalist, the man in plain clothes asked me when I would be leaving the US.

"As soon as I can," I responded. I left about four hours later.

We left, still unable to repudiate the scurrilous allegations against us, but the contract I had entered into with the Angolan General Staff needed to be honoured regardless of what anyone said, claimed, or did.

Some of our men had already honoured the contract with their blood. Some of them still rested in unmarked graves close to where they had died.

FAA Special Force Commandos on parade (Photo Unknown)

20:
The War Continues

Despite having suffered numerous defeats at the hands of 16-Brigade—and my belief that it was beginning to face the final destruction of its armed efforts— UNITA was by no means a spent force. Their determination to reclaim the strategic diamond town of Cafunfu saw a continuation of daily artillery bombardments and attempted penetration night attacks, and inward-bound Mi-17s still had to brave the UNITA anti-aircraft belt between Saurimo and Cafunfu to keep 16 brigade re- supplied, bring in reinforcements, and evacuate casualties.

Under the vigilant command of Roelf van Heerden, our men in Cafunfu consolidated their positions and expanded 16 Brigade's perimeter. Frequent fighting patrols combed the area, intent on keeping UNITA at bay—and succeeding at UNITA's expense.

In other provinces, the FAA was aggressively doing battle with UNITA, and areas that had long been under UNITA control gradually changed hands as the FAA retook villages, towns, and cities. While they talked about peace in Lusaka, UNITA (assisted by Zaire and other countries) was still building up forces.

Ciaran Ryan wrote an article in the South African Sunday Times headlined, 'Diamonds pay for UNITA's war'. Finally, what we had been saying all along, was slowly beginning to surface. The following is an extract:

The question of how UNITA is bankrolling its civil war in Angola is apparently answered in the latest trade statistics released by the Department of Customs and Excise. The figures show a huge 58% increase in imports from Zaire in the first four months of the year, almost all of its precious and semi-precious stones believed to be diamonds and emeralds [were] smuggled from Angola for sale to South African dealers.

South African imports from Zaire were valued at R 107,7 million between January and April, R 104 million of which was precious and semi-precious stones. This compares with R68 million over the same period a year ago.

Intelligence sources say airfields in southern Zaire are being used to smuggle arms to UNITA rebels.

Since the inception of my Strategic Intelligence Group we had known that Zaire was playing a major role in supporting UNITA and that a large proportion of the weapons and equipment in use by UNITA had been supplied by several countries (South Africa included) via Zaire. President Mobutu had also played a pivotal role in providing rear-base facilities for UNITA in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mobutu had been an important Cold War ally to the United States, who had used him in its efforts to balance black 'democrats' against black communists. He would soon outlive his usefulness.

When the Cold War ended, Zaire continued to support UNITA, pocketing huge profits from sanction-busting activities. These involved, not only the provision of rear bases and

supply lines for weapons and ammunition, but more profitably, a pipeline for conflict diamonds to South Africa, Belgium, and elsewhere.

UNITA troops forming up for a parade, Jamba, Southern Angola. Their equipment was channelled through both South Africa and Zaire
(photo: Jim Hooper)

In the Cafunfu area UNITA's casualties grew as the fighting patrols engaged them in battle. FAA's casualties were also mounting, but 16 Brigade still doggedly clung to Cafunfu.

We had to contend with another serious loss to the company when Pine Pienaar and his team of fighter pilots left EO in search of new flying jobs. Some had been offered lucrative contracts by private charter companies and others by international airlines. Their outstanding efforts and bravery would be sorely missed. They had saved the day, and the lives of our men, on numerous occasions. We didn't know it at the time, but UNITA was immediately informed of these resignations which meant they no longer needed to factor accurate day and night time raids and strikes by the MiG-23s into their operational planning and this boosted their flagging morale somewhat.

My intelligence agents both in South Africa and Angola were reporting that UNITA, under pressure from several quarters, was planning a major offensive aimed at recapturing the Cafunfu diamond fields.

I issued a press release in the hope of getting at least one journalist interested in what was really happening.

It stated:

Executive Outcomes has been advised that UNITA is planning to launch a major offensive to recapture the diamond area of Cafunfu within the next few weeks. Executive Outcomes believes that certain SA government officials are still actively supporting UNITA without the knowledge of the majority political party, and with SA taxpayers' money. 'Friends' in South Africa have advised UNITA to call for and sign a cease-fire. This will allow:

1. The Angolan Armed Forces to be monitored by the United Nations, giving UNITA vital time to rebuild a defeated army and restore morale as they have done in the past.
2. UNITA time to 'gather' and train a so-called army to show to the UN whilst the main UNITA forces are kept in reserve and in hiding, ready to launch an offensive.

Needless to say, everyone who received the press release promptly ignored it.

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One morning early in August, Nico told me he had been warned that Eugene de Kok and Henri van der Westhuizen had been contracted to 'eliminate' me.

I had met Eugene de Kok while he was in command of the South African Police's notorious counter-insurgency unit (C-10) but we had never been more than passing acquaintances.

Apparently contracted to kill the author, Eugene de Kok and his shadow, Henri van der Westhuizen, hurriedly left when confronted
(photo: theguardian.com)

C-10, created in 1981, had been based on the Vlakplaas Farm south-west of Pretoria and the unit had invariably become known just as 'Vlakplaas'. The media had first revealed its existence in 1989 on the eve of the execution of a former police officer, Almond Nofomela,[236] who had been sentenced to death for murder.

A few hours before he was due to be hanged, Nofomela had confessed to

having been a member of the top secret Security Branch 'hit squad' and said he had committed the murder on orders from his erstwhile commander, Captain Dirk Coetzee.

De Kok had assumed command of the unit after Coetzee fled the country to join the ANC in Lusaka from where he had exposed Vlakplaas and its numerous operations.

As a result of extensive media coverage on the activities in which Vlakplaas had been involved, de Kok was feared by many and had a reputation for being ruthless. As a police unit, Vlakplaas was by then already doomed.

I knew Henri from my time at MI where he had been an intelligence analyst. He was a man who liked to associate with 'tough guys' in the vain hope of being regarded in the same light. He was an average intelligence officer who had served time at Special Forces HQ and it was said he had, on occasion, tried to pass himself off as a qualified Special Forces operator.

I had never trusted Henri; I suspected he was stealing state funds and living beyond his means. My suspicions were validated when he testified to having done exactly that before the TRC.

Van der Westhuizen claimed to be one of de Kok's partners and was also closely linked to a company known as Executive Research Associates (ERA), a group of mainly ex-MI officers who were said to maintain close ties to MI and were ostensibly involved in gathering 'business intelligence'. I believed it was merely a front company. Years later I learnt that van der Westhuizen had been re-appointed under another secret project and had continued to work for MI in spite of the Goldstone Commission's findings aimed at eliminating corruption within DCC.

"De Kok has the means to kill you, and with his contacts in the police, he can make any investigation into your death simply wither away and die. He has done this type of thing before. By all accounts, the man is a merciless killer," a concerned Nico told me.

"That might be so but there is a difference between shooting helpless and unarmed civilians and shooting someone who is armed and able to defend himself—I am certainly not the former."

Nico tried to get me to report his information to the police. I wasn't convinced. "Considering how (Major) van Taak conducted his investigation the last time my life was threatened, I think the police are the last people I should call," I told him. "Operators who accept assassination contracts seem to consider themselves untouchable. I think I would rather invite them both to our offices for coffee and a chat."

Nico duly arranged for them to come to our Danny Street offices at 10:00 one weekday morning. For some strange reason neither de Kok nor van der Westhuizen questioned the reason for the invitation. Perhaps they saw it as an ideal opportunity to case the premises and find out whether or not I was likely to be armed.

When they arrived I guided them to the porch and waved them into chairs. Nico went to make us coffee and then joined us while we exchanged pleasantries. Then I made my move.

"Eugene, I have been reliably informed that you and Henri have a contract to kill me," I said bluntly.

De Kok paled and van der Westhuizen appeared to have lost his faculty of speech. Nico smiled and offered them more coffee.

Eventually de Kok regained some of his composure and blustered his way through a feeble explanation.

"No," he blurted, "you've misunderstood. Henri and I have come to warn you that someone has taken out a contract on you ... someone wants you out of the equation."

I knew he was lying.

"Well, Eugene," I responded, "If you and Henri do intend to shoot me, please do it in the garden and not in the office or the house. Nico has just had the carpets cleaned and I don't want them stained. On the other hand, if I am in any way harmed, Nico, Lafras, and the rest of the crew will know who did it and I can assure you that you, your family, your friends, and even your fucking cats and dogs will find the world too small a place to hide. In short, you will be hunted to the ends of the earth and exterminated like the vermin you are. I also think it would be in your very best interest to make sure that nobody tries to harm me—ever."

Both loudly protested their innocence, but I had said what I needed to say and merely waved them away from my offices. I never heard from them again.

De Kok[237] was later tried for crimes he had committed as the commander of Vlakplaas and sentenced to two life sentences plus 212 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He was remanded in Pretoria Maximum Security prison. During his trial he falsely claimed to have tried to warn me there would be an attempt on my life. He was eventually released from prison and placed under house arrest after having served nineteen years.

Later, during a short and tearful television appearance, van der Westhuizen[238] admitted to having worked against the ANC as an intelligence officer. He continued working for ERA as a director.

Despite numerous threats and several failed attempts on my life, I was not under as much stress as our men in Angola were. They had to face a dogged UNITA, who was determined to kill them, every day. Anonymous callers also continued to threaten the families of Executive Outcomes employees and the men must have remained aware of this most of the time. Many of the men had also lost close friends in the conflict, and, given the strong bonds forged between men in combat, that too was like losing family.

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Finding itself incapable of rapidly recapturing Cafunfu, UNITA was rumoured to be intending to sue for peace. Ironically, it appeared that EO had been able to force this change of attitude within a year despite the SADF having supported and sided with UNITA since 1975. The media never questioned this sudden turn of events. Perhaps they had been ordered not to.

When EO entered Angola, the MPLA and FAA had both believed they were close to losing the war. UNITA had dominated the country and scored victory after victory against FAA. But the loss of Cafunfu had impacted them severely. There was an overall drop in morale and numerous personality clashes occurred within their upper echelons, merely increasing the frustration within their ranks. UNITA's press releases (many apparently penned in Midrand, South Africa) continued to lay the blame for the ongoing war on EO. Indeed, UNITA were advised that a precondition for any peace agreement had to insist on the removal of EO from Angola.

Radio Vorgan, UNITA's radio station (installed at great cost to South African taxpayers), regularly called on the international community to affect our speedy removal

from Angola 'in the name of peace'. Somehow these words seemed to echo Military Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, and Sean Cleary's sentiments.

EO wasn't the stumbling block to peace in Angola. As even UNAVEM II were eventually forced to note:

In the statement made by the President of the Security Council on 12 August 1994, Council members expressed their impatience over the protracted nature of the negotiations and warned that the peace process could not be delayed indefinitely. The Council strongly urged UNITA to demonstrate its commitment to peace and to accept the complete set of proposals put forward by the Secretary-General's Special Representative and the representatives of the three observer States.

One of my UNITA agents reported that Dr Jonas Savimbi had told his senior officials that he didn't want to take responsibility for signing the Lusaka Peace Accords and that he had tasked three negotiators to attend to UNITA's interests. They were Isaias Samakuva, Jorge Valentim, and Eugenio Manuvakola.

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Unconfirmed reports gathered through Carl Dietz's intelligence network indicated that there was a large UNITA build-up to the east of Saurimo. My own agents also reported that UNITA intended to launch a large 'revenge' attack in the Lunda Sul Province.

With UNITA's continual attempts to disrupt the Mi-17 chain shuttling men and supplies from Saurimo to 16 Brigade, our base at Saurimo presented a perfect target for such an attack. If UNITA killed our men or destroyed our air support assets, the EO/FAA garrison would be cut off from outside support.

Appreciating the danger, Duncan took the men of Hennie's combat team (recently returned from leave) to investigate. They fine-combed the area to the east of Saurimo where the UNITA presence was reported to be, but found no trace of any recent activity and decided it was safe to negate the reports.

On 9 September while returning to Saurimo, the team was forced to cross an improvised bridge that the FAA had thrown over the Luachimo River. During the crossing, the bridge supports collapsed and one of the BMPs slipped off and fell into the river. The men worked frantically to rescue Paul Dittrich, the driver, who was trapped inside, but they were too late. Being unable to escape the submerged BMP, Paul drowned —and EO lost yet another man.

Paul was well-liked and his death once again sent many of the men into depression. As Hennie Blaauw's driver, he had fought his way across the Lunda Sul and Lunda Norte Provinces from Saurimo to Cafunfu—only to die in a freak accident. I received the news in stunned silence. Although I hadn't known Paul personally, he had been one of my men and his death was another great loss to the company.

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Shortly thereafter I flew to Angola to meet with Generals de Matos and Itha. Lafras and Nic had been interfacing with the generals for many months and were on very good terms with them. For my part, I merely used to arrive at their offices, discuss what needed to be discussed, then fly back to Pretoria. If I had the time, I would visit Cabo Ledo and Rio Longa to see and talk to the men but I seldom managed even to get to Saurimo. I made it to Cacolo once and that was hours after our men had captured it from UNITA.

The generals agreed that UNITA would soon be seeking peace, but were concerned about this move being a smokescreen behind which to rebuild forces. They again reminded me that when peace came, EO would need to assist with the integration of UNITA forces into the FAA.

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It doesn't take much to unravel the duplicity of governments and their associates. One article in the Rapport of 18 September 1994 told of a large shipment of weapons from South Africa bound for 'somewhere in the Middle East'.

A small report subsequently appeared in the Pretoria News on the 21 September 1994 under the headline, 'Yemen turns back ship carrying SA arms'.

This was part of an on-going saga about an arms shipment that had been bobbing around on the ocean for some time, apparently without an owner. The article stated:

COPENHAGEN – A Danish cargo ship carrying weapons from South Africa was today plying the Red Sea after being turned back from Yemen, the shipping agent said.

The South African supplier said the arms were ultimately intended for Lebanon…. After leaving Cape Town, the ship, Arktis Pioneer, arrived earlier this month at San'a, capital of Yemen, said Mr Torben Palle Hansen of the Copenhagen-based Elite Shipping company…

This shipment from Armscor comprised 'mainly Russian-made AK-47 rifles' according to their spokesman, Mr Bertus Celliers.

As allegations and accusations flew across the oceans, it was claimed that the weapons had been en route, either to Lebanon or Yemen—neither of which had any need to order Russian-made equipment from South Africa of all places. Both of those countries had seen massive influxes of soviet-made weapons and equipment during their internal conflicts. Neither was, at that time, still engaged in civil war.

Faced with a growing dilemma, Armscor, the shipping company, and the ship's captain had to get rid of these weapons rather quickly in order to prevent any further embarrassment or negative publicity.

The Artkis Pioneer was compromised while carrying a secret consignment of weapons from South Africa to UNITA (photo: ShipSpotting)

Sometime in mid-September I received a phone call from Rex Knott, the Managing Director of Tripaust Ltd., a UK-based military equipment trading company who I had approached some time earlier for quotations for body armour. He knew we were working in Angola and thought I might be interested in what he was offering.

"Listen, I have a whole ship loaded with AK-47's, G-3's,[239] and others, as well as ammunition—the seller is referring to the shipment as 'frustrated' cargo. Would you be interested in offering them to the Angolans or giving me an introduction to them? Perhaps I can off-load them there," he said.

"You know we aren't in the weapons trade, Rex. Besides, Angola is awash with AK-47s."

"I know, but these weapons are going for a very good price. Besides which, they were apparently destined for Angola even though all-and-sundry now claim they are off to Yemen. You shafted the deal by capturing the diamond fields—UNITA can't afford to pay for them now. It would be a cruel twist of fate if weapons destined for UNITA ended up being used against them," Rex replied.

I undertook to discuss the matter with the FAA.

As Executive Outcomes was not, despite media reporting to the contrary, involved in the arms trade, it was the best I could do for Rex. Little did I realise what was coming or what a potential bombshell was about to burst.

Rex duly faxed the single page consignment list to me. It read as follows:

THE CONSIGNMENT CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:
AK-47 RIFLES

9212 PCS – 7,62 X 39MM TYPE 56 AK-47
FIXED STOCK WITH FOLDING BAYONET, 2 X MAGAZINES & SLING
THE GENERAL CONDITIONS OF THE WEAPONS IS NEW, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ± 80 PERCENT, WHICH IS USED BUT VERY GOOD CONDITION.

PACKED INTO 12 x 20 FT CONTAINERS R2-HK-G3 RIFLES
11,566 PCS R2 HK-G3 RIFLES (NEW CONDITIONS)
4,099 AS ABOVE (BUT IN USED CONDITIONS)
SUPPLIED WITH FULL MAGAZINES (EXTRA) SPARES AND ACCESSORIES PACKED IN 12 x 20 FT CONTAINERS
7.62 X 39MM AMMUNITION
BALL: 11,753,006 MILLION ROUNDS TRACER: 1,393,298 MILLION ROUNDS M67 BALL: 397,654 ROUNDS
PACKED INTO 10 X 20 FT CONTAINERS

The cargo manifest showed that the Armscor spokesman's statement about the cargo comprising 'mainly Russian-made AK-47 rifles' had clearly been a lie. The G3 rifles outnumbered the AKs by more than 2 000 pieces.

According to Rex, this ship had been floating around trying to off-load its cargo since 'sometime in early-September', shortly after UNITA had lost Cafunfu to the FAA/Executive Outcomes air assault.

Suddenly, it dawned on me why UNITA had so ferociously tried to drive my men out of Soyo in March/April 1993—Soyo was the only Angolan harbour they had and weapons had been due to come through it. Some of their payments in diamonds were also leaving Angola via Soyo. Having lost Soyo, UNITA had been forced to use the Zairian port Matadi, and then transport the equipment across the Congo River and into Angola. I now finally understood why UNITA's office in London had received a phone call from the parliament building in Cape Town more than a year before, urging them to remove my men from Soyo at all costs.

SA wapens was bestem vir Unita

Jan de Lange

DIE besending AK-47's, G3-gewere en ammunisie wat non in die Rooi See ronddobber, was oorspronklik vir Unita bestem, maar die transaksie het skeefgeloop nadat die besending wapens reeds verskeep was.

Dit verklaar ook waarom Libanon op dokumentasie as eindbestemming vir die wapens vermeld word.

daarvoor betaal nie," het mnr. Barlow gister gesê.

'n Ander Europese agent het hom op 20 September gesukkel om dieselfde besending wapens te probeer verkoop. Ook hy het gesê die wapens sou oorspronklik aan Unita verkoop word.

'n Derde agent het op 22 September die wapens aan mnr. Barlow aangebied, maar het nie die band met Unita genoem nie. Hy het 'n skriftelike lys van die be-

The Beeld newspaper report (30 September 1994) confirming that South African weapons were destined for UNITA

I started investigating the Arktis Pioneer and learnt that the South African freight company involved was known as 'Eagle Freight'. I also discovered that our Minister of Finance, Mr Derek Keyes, was one of Eagle Freight's directors. Suddenly it all made sense to me.

I discussed the matter with Lafras and Nico. We agreed we should pass the story to the media.

"Jesus, do you realise what we have here?" Nico asked.

"We have proof that South Africa, despite all its denials, is still supplying weapons to UNITA. Even worse, someone is pocketing a lot of Angolan diamonds and I am sure that as usual, the taxpayers are blissfully ignorant," I said. "Even our dear Minister of Finances seems to be involved."

With that, I made a few phone calls. To my amazement, most journalists were not even interested in the information I gave them. Others claimed they did not want to embarrass the new ANC-led Government of National Unity—despite the fact that the finger was not being pointed at the ANC; many of the government's ministers, at that time, belonged to the old National Party. The people who were carrying out these deeds were the same people who had been carrying them out for years—and they were most definitely opposed to the ANC.

The damage control started with an article in the 1 October 1994 edition of Pretoria News. Under the headline, ''We were duped': Armscor', reporter Steve Matthewson wrote:

Armscor admitted it was duped by a Lebanese weapons dealer into parting with 25 000 automatic rifles and ammunition to an unknown destination.

The clearly embarrassed management of Africa's largest arms acquisition agency confirmed at a press conference last night that it had sold R2,3 million worth of AK-47s and G3s to a man purporting to be acting on behalf of the Lebanese government.

However, the corporation firmly denied that it had done a deal with Jonas Savimbi's Unita rebel movement, and sent the guns via the Mediterranean to circumvent the United Nations arms embargo on Angola.

The article went on to explain how Armscor had been misled having 'failed to verify the authenticity of the 'End User Certificate' presented by 'Mr Wazan'', the mysterious man who had claimed he represented the Lebanese government. Whoever 'Wazan' was, it was clear that he was going to be the proverbial scapegoat. Anyone who has ever worked in the arms industry knows that an End User Certificate is never issued without the necessary verification.

Tuesday 4 October 1994 THE CITIZEN

Armscor scandal may have been rivals' work

In an effort to deflect blame from themselves, Armscor got Jakkie Cilliers of the ISS to speculate that Armscor had been set up by a 'rival'

To determine what had really happened, President Nelson Mandela appointed a commission of inquiry to investigate illegal arms dealing and particularly the sale of weapons to Yemen, a country to which South Africa was not allowed to sell arms according to government policy. The Commission was headed by Judge Edwin Cameron and became widely known as the Cameron Commission.

When the Cameron Commission finally tabled the findings of its investigation into this affair,[240] it made for fascinating reading, especially as the intended purchaser of the weapons, UNITA, was never mentioned at all. This was, in my opinion, just another white-wash to hide the blame and protect the guilty. The press did publish one article, but it went largely unnoticed.[241]

Needless to say, the Commission found that no one person or organisation was liable for the 'error'. This outcome disappointed us but it didn't surprise us. We would gladly have given evidence had we been called upon to do so. It was most probably 'in the National interest' that we were simply ignored or that the whole mess was covered up.

"I told you this would happen," Lafras laughed.

The Commission proved how easily everything could be manipulated to serve a purpose.

It was very clear to many of us that there was no interest in a peaceful or stable Angola — it was bad for business. Perhaps this explained the constant attacks on us by Cleary, DFA, MI, and their friends in the media, all working silently in the corridors of power.

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On my next visit to Angola, I discussed the working documents for the top-secret Operation Fireball which I had submitted to De Matos in May 1994. Its aim was 'to present the FAA General Staff with the option of recapturing Soyo as well as the immediate military exploitation thereof'. Denied the harbour at Soyo, UNITA's supply chain would become even more problematic and precarious. This would cripple UNITA militarily. I had initially included the attack and capture of Soyo in my sketch of a broad strategy to General Itha several months prior to this meeting.

"When do you want this put into operation, General?" I asked.

"Soon. Timing is important. We must be assured of complete success when we do it."

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Lafras later told me that Duncan was being redeployed elsewhere and that he was sending Oom Hennie to Saurimo to assume overall command there. I agreed that Hennie was the best man for the job. He also told me that 16 Brigade had been heavily reinforced with new intakes of FAA recruits who had completed their training, so our men there were being trooped from Cafunfu back to Saurimo and Cabo Ledo for redeployment. Roelf van Heerden would become Hennie's second-in- command.

The FAA was also engaged in redeployments and General Marques (the Saurimo area commander) was replaced by General Mendez. Mendez was concerned about the UNITA presence between Saurimo and Cafunfu and saw the recapture of Cacolo as his first priority. New BMPs were flown to Saurimo to strengthen what would become Hennie's new combat team.

At last light on 17 October UNITA attacked the FAA outpost at Lugia, only twelve kilometres west of Saurimo. While the attack was not conducted with the same determination and intensity as previous attacks had been, the fact that UNITA were again operating close to Saurimo posed a threat to General Mendez's area of responsibility as well as to Saurimo itself. Mendez called Hennie for a midnight discussion and asked him to assemble a task force to race to the assistance of Lugia's defenders. They reached Lugia well before dawn on 18 October, strengthened the position, and began to conduct area operations to track down the enemy.

At sunrise EO trackers, followed closely by the BMP-2s for fire support, were on UNITA's tail. As the trackers began to close in, UNITA abandoned some of their wounded, but this time they didn't shoot them for fear of revealing their position to the follow up group. With the trackers and the BMPs in hot pursuit, UNITA began to run.

The first contact occurred early in the afternoon and two UNITA soldiers were captured after a brief firefight. While they were being taken back to Lugia for in- depth interrogation the BMP crew commander, Tertius Haasbroek, was struck by an overhanging branch and two of his cervical vertebrae were badly damaged. The medics on hand immediately gave him what attention they could while a casevac was sent to airlift him from the area and fly him to Lanseria Airport. From there a waiting ambulance would race him to Olivedale Clinic. Tertius would be crippled for life. The delay caused by his tragic injury gave the UNITA attackers the opportunity to escape.

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Further west, FAA forces were gathering to implement elements of Operation Fireball and retake Soyo. As a strategic on-shore oil facility and harbour, Soyo's loss would deprive UNITA of both a harbour for equipment deliveries and a safe area. In economic terms, it would allow the oil industry to continue its work and generate capital for the government.

Soyo fell to an FAA attack in late-October 1994 and numerous fleeing troops crossed into Zaire for sanctuary.

General De Matos requested that an EO force be moved to Soyo, and Jannie Wools, an ex-Special Forces officer, was sent to command the contingent there. Jannie, a student from my days in Special Forces' covert training programmes, soon made his presence felt, stabilizing the area and clearing the mess UNITA had left behind.

Jannie ran an efficient but tight ship. His team established numerous clinics, provided protection and security for the oil companies and their staff, and quickly built up a reputation for being willing and able to help whoever and wherever they could. The locals were particularly happy to have them around. The UN and other aid agencies, despite also calling for our removal from Angola, were equally keen to call on Jannie and his team when they needed help.

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General Mendez was still determined to recapture Cacolo. Hennie and Roelf planned the operation and readied their combat team's crews and infantry. In late October the FAA's newly-trained and equipped 39 Infantry Battalion was moved to Saurimo to assist with the operation, and marrying-up drills between our men and the FAA were rapidly completed. After rehearsals and final preparations had been done, they were ready to commence the advance. Hennie remained in Saurimo as the operational commander while Roelf assumed responsibility as the tactical commander and commander of the EO combat team.

When Lafras told me we were involved in a plan to attack and retake Cacolo I told him I disagreed. I felt my men had contributed enough to the shooting war and that they should be pulled back to Cabo Ledo and Rio Longa to continue training FAA recruits. I discussed this with Lafras and Nic van den Berg. They agreed with me, but the FAA General Staff, who regarded us as part of FAA and no longer a private company, had demanded that EO take part in the operation. I finally relented and EO once more entered into combat with UNITA.

On 31 October MPLA and UNITA initialled the Lusaka Protocol and President dos Santos gave the United States and the UN an undertaking that the FAA would not launch an offensive against the UNITA headquarters at Huambo where Dr Savimbi was in hiding. I was astonished that this Protocol made provision for the protection of Savimbi, who was determined to overthrow the MPLA government and seize control in Angola.

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On 1 November, Roelf's combat team, with the FAA's 39 Infantry Battalion bringing up the rear, left Lugia and the second advance on Cacolo began.

Later in the day an FAA sapper was killed while lifting a booby-trapped anti- personnel mine. The explosion also caused serious sandblast injuries to the eyes of one of our men who was hurriedly casevaced to Saurimo and thence to Olivedale Clinic in one of the King Airs.

Knowing Cacolo's strategic value, Roelf decided to forge ahead. Soon thereafter, one of the BMPs detonated a landmine and another casevac was needed for a crewman who had

suffered a serious injury to his neck. Thankfully the rest of the crew were only shaken and dazed from the blast and wanted to continue. However, their BMP was damaged beyond repair so they opted to drive in a Ural truck supporting the unit's logistics effort. On 4 November General Mendez—despite Hennie's undiplomatic protestations—made a poor command decision and sent the Mi-17 helicopters on a mission to Luena,[242] depriving Roelf of his casevac ability. Since Pine Pienaar and his team of fighter pilots had left the company, the men were also without any close air support. Having been advised that EO had no fighter pilots left, UNITA wanted to press their advantage.

Later that day, Roelf's combat team drove into a large UNITA ambush. With gunfire erupting around them and unable to call for an airstrike, they were hard- pressed to fight their way out of the killing ground. Under heavy incoming fire, they poured fire back in UNITA's general direction, but the enemy were hidden by the dense bush. During the firefight, Jan Kellerman was seriously wounded.

Roelf called for an immediate casevac, which left Hennie at his wits end because the helicopters hadn't yet returned from Luena. Meanwhile, oblivious to the battle raging around them, the medics worked desperately to stabilise Jan and prepare him for emergency evacuation.

When the helicopters finally arrived back from Luena and touched down at Saurimo, Hennie immediately briefed an exhausted Juba Joubert and JC Linde to implement the casevac. General Mendez was furious as he considered Hennie's re- tasking without his permission to be an act of insubordination. Hennie, incensed that the general thought he should abandon a casualty, told Mendez exactly what he thought of him. The general had no idea how close he came to being physically assaulted.

By then Roelf's combat team and 39 Infantry Battalion were coming under intense direct and indirect fire from mortars and B-10 recoilless rifles and the men fought desperately to secure a landing zone for the casevac. Juba and JC flew in to load the casualties while the other helicopter orbited the LZ, ready to deliver suppressing fire with its PKM machine guns. Jan and two FAA soldiers who had also been seriously wounded were hastily loaded into the Mi-17 along with the body of one killed.

Juba, his helicopter coming under sporadic fire, managed to negotiate his way out of the LZ while the second helicopter continued orbiting and keeping UNITA's heads down with PKM fire. The doctor worked frantically to stabilise Jan while en route to Saurimo.

Jan was transferred as soon as the King Air arrived back at Saurimo later that night, and the aircraft took off again for Lanseria. Jan died on the flight back home. It was 5 November 1994.

On 6 November Roelf's combat team and 39 Infantry ran into a ferocious UNITA defensive line west of the Alto Cuilo River. They had deployed anti-tank guns (new B-12s and 106mms), ranged the distances, and were waiting for the BMPs to enter their killing zone. Determined to prevent them from crossing the river, UNITA fought a spirited delaying action. The BMPs retaliated with massive automatic fire.

Roelf's forward elements identified large UNITA infantry concentrations on high ground on the far side of the river and hit them with 30mm cannon and rocket fire. Pinned

down under accurate and intensive fire, Roelf was forced to call for an air strike.

Having no EO MiG pilots to scramble, Hennie made a desperate plea to General Mendez for help. Mendez, in turn, passed the request to the Angolan Air Force's Colonel Gino. Soon thereafter, a young Angolan SU-22 pilot was despatched to deliver the close air support Roelf so desperately needed.

An FAA-piloted SU-22 taxiing prior to take off to deliver close air support to EO's combat team (photo: H Blaauw)

Coming in low and fast, he identified the target and carried out an accurate low- level attack on UNITA's positions using rocket and cannon fire. UNITA had believed that close air support was no longer available to the FAA, and the air attack took them by complete surprise and routed them. Soon thereafter, the combat team and the FAA were able to cross the Alto Cuilo River and continue their advance without further UNITA interference. UNITA later resumed their harassment of the force with mortar, B-12, and 106mm fire. The advance slowed to a crawl and the infantry were forced to dismount and clear the route ahead of the BMPs and other vehicles. The helicopter pilots continued to resupply the unit and casevac the wounded when called for. Oom Hennie later recounted the situation to me:

General Mendez and I had a major blow-up. It had been brewing for some time but it finally exploded into the open at 07:00 on 9 November 1994. I noted it in my diary.

He wanted us to simply race forward and occupy Cacolo. To his thinking, things were going too slowly… or maybe he just wanted to impress the FAA high command. I wasn't about to expose anyone to unnecessary risk. I also reminded him that UNITA still controlled the terrain we were on, despite us having defeated them in battle. As such, they still posed a real danger to us.

Ahead lay the Tchicunda River[243] and another ten or twelve kilometres of hostile territory. I had no intention of ordering my combat team to race blindly into that mess and I told Mendez so.

Then Mendez really pissed me off by accusing us of being scared of UNITA. I asked him to leave my headquarters immediately—no, I actually told him to fuck-off. I was furious.

In his defence he returned later and apologised for his uncalled for remark. I told him that I accepted his apology, but the reality was I didn't.

Hennie's anger at Mendez was understandable. Had it not been for EO, the FAA would still have been holed up in Luanda waiting for UNITA's final push on the capital. Our pilots, both fixed wing and helicopter, had flown countless sorties, often braving intense antiaircraft fire to relieve pressure on the FAA. Some of our men had been killed and many more had been wounded while helping the FAA bring an end to the war. The courage and determination of our men was beyond dispute.

By mid-afternoon on 9 November Roelf reached the outskirts of Cacolo. For nine days they had outfought and outmanoeuvred UNITA's delaying positions and ambushes. For nine days they had endured savage direct and indirect enemy fire but they had finally triumphed.

Roelf requested a last resupply before the final assault and an additional 30 men were choppered in to bolster the attack. The final orders were given and the men got ready, but by the time the combat team and 39 Infantry entered Cacolo, UNITA had lost its spirit and will to defend the town 'to the last man'. Instead, they had retreated into the bush.

Rapidly exploiting the situation, Roelf set about consolidating their position. Area operations were mounted to stabilise the surrounds, new defensive positions were built, old positions were strengthened, and mortar defensive fire and DF SOS tasks were registered. Indirect fire from UNITA's mortar and B-12 positions was rapidly answered and neutralised.

Cacolo slowly returned to life as the locals attempted to rebuild their shattered lives. Our medics once again began treating the povo at their clinics and Roelf set out to rebuild the town's collapsed administrative system.

UNITA never attacked Cacolo again.

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The FAA's countrywide offensive was gaining momentum and UNITA was on the run. Under great pressure on the battlefield, UNITA issued a communiqué on 8 November:

The MPLA government has chosen war over peace. Following the initialling of the Lusaka Protocol, nothing justified the convergent attack on Huambo. On 4 November 1994, our President personally telephoned the American Secretary of State for African Affairs, HE George Moose, the Zambian President, HE Frederick Chiluba, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, His Excellency Alioune Blondin Beye, to ask that the offensive against Huambo be halted.

The MPLA forces have not entered the Huambo City up until today, 8 November 1994. They are twelve kilometres outside the city ... The Huambo Airport has already been destroyed. As for the other propaganda, the MPLA and its chief are lying. We will only be in Lusaka if the attack on Huambo doesn't begin or when it ends.

Aside from being a plea to the international community to intervene, this communiqué was also an indication of the huge pressure UNITA now found itself under.

On 9 November UNITA issued another communiqué through its Free Angola Information Service based in Washington, DC. It was a thinly disguised attempt to opt out of the Lusaka Protocol if it didn't get exactly what it wanted, and also to blame the MPLA for the fact that the Protocol had not yet been signed. It contained another false claim, apparently made by UNITA General Arlinda Chenda Pena 'Ben- Ben' on 8 November:

South African Special Forces mercenaries hired by the government [MPLA] are still attempting to locate the UNITA President Dr. Jonas Malheiro Savimbi and kill him.

Ben-Ben's statement had its origins within the South African media who, in turn, had faithfully reported what MI had told them to report. 'Ben-Ben' also claimed that 56 men of South Africa's 4 and 5 Reconnaissance Regiments had left their Durban base[244] to join the FAA. We knew, as did UNITA, that this was an utter lie.

We also knew that on the military front they were now verging on collapse.

An EO helicopter doing resupply at Cacolo (Photo H Blaauw)

21:
Staggering towards Peace

Angola's Day of Independence is 11 November.

That day in 1994 was an optimistic one for Angolans; UNITA had finally agreed to sign the Lusaka Protocol. Many assumed that this would herald a return to genuine independence and a much yearned-for peace but I doubted this and voiced my views to anyone who was willing to listen.

UNITA had been convincingly defeated by the FAA over a wide front on the battlefield. They had lost the strategic diamond mining town of Cafunfu and were coming under increasing pressure, both from within and outside their ranks, to accept a cease-fire. Soyo too, had again fallen to FAA.

With UNITA reeling from FAA's actions across several provinces, the MPLA was finally able to negotiate from a position of strength and reach an agreement regarding the cessation of hostilities. Both parties were war-weary and everybody wanted the killing and destruction brought to an end. Angola could finally take its first tottering steps towards rebuilding a shattered landscape and uniting the nation.

In South Africa, Executive Outcomes was increasingly viewed as a pro-communist organisation and the SANDF's MI continued its smear and disinformation campaign against the company.

Similarly, the various intelligence agencies, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Sean Cleary's Strategic Concepts, and numerous other individuals and organisations continued to generate false 'intelligence' about us. The media remained enthusiastic about publishing these lies.

Around this time it was again claimed that EO had accepted contracts with both the FAA and UNITA. This falsehood—an attempt to drive a wedge between FAA and EO and to destroy the trust we had built up with the Angolan General Staff— was used extensively. I had given up denying such allegations; it was just a waste of breath and the Angolan General Staff had rejected them with scorn.

The long-awaited peace agreement known as the Lusaka Protocol, initialled at the end of October, was finally signed by Venancio de Moura (Minister of External Relations) on behalf of the Angolan government, and Secretary-General Eugenio Manuvakola (UNITA's chief negotiator) on 20 November 1994. President dos Santos, several heads of state, and foreign ministers and other dignitaries witnessed the event. Jonas Savimbi refused to attend. Still keen to capture international sympathy, he cited concerns for his personal safety. The protocol was intended to formally mark the end of the bloody and costly civil war.

The Lusaka Protocol now made provision for:

- A complete cease-fire;
- The integration of UNITA's general officers and other ranks into the FAA;
- UNITA's demobilisation, later changed to 'demilitarisation' under UN supervision;

- The repatriation of mercenaries i.e. EO;
- The incorporation of UNITA troops into the Angolan National Police; and
- The prohibition of any internal surveillance organisation.

The UN, ever keen to show its involvement in bringing about peace (despite its conspicuous absence in attempts to end the war in Angola) took control of the major political issues covered in the protocol and undertook the role of peacekeeper in the completion of the electoral process and national reconciliation.

Certain that UNITA would use the agreement as a mechanism through which to gain time to rebuild its shattered forces, General De Matos told me privately that he thought the signing of the protocol had been a grave error and ill-timed. As the UN was permitting UNITA to continue purchasing and moving arms and ammunition, he didn't believe the UN could be trusted to enforce the protocol, and if the FAA couldn't trust the UN, they couldn't trust UNITA. The general was convinced that the cease-fire would only be effective once UNITA's military capacity had been totally destroyed. The UN also prohibited the MPLA from having an internal surveillance organisation,[245] so there was no way to monitor UNITA's intentions. Without intelligence, the MPLA and FAA would be blind to UNITA's intended plans and activities. The general believed the peace would soon erupt into war again.

I concurred as it had long been a tactic of anti-government forces to call for a ceasefire when under military pressure and then rebuild and rearm their forces. Unless an unconditional surrender was offered by UNITA, war was likely to fester and boil over again under the UN's watchful gaze.

Although the cease-fire came into effect on 22 November, the situation on the battlefield remained tense throughout Angola. Despite deploying a fairly large force bolstered by Zairean troops at Sumba—close to Soyo, which was firmly under Jannie Wools' control—UNITA never launched a major assault to recapture the town or the harbour.

General De Matos was well aware of the mounting pressure, especially from the US and UN, to terminate our contract but he was adamant that we should stay and continue our work. While hoping that the war had indeed ended, he had seen too many about-turns by UNITA in the past and believed it would provide a form of guarantee for his government if we stayed. As the FAA's supreme commander, he felt that with or without the protocol, his function was still to ensure that the army would be able to respond to any threats to his country.

I issued a press release which stated:

The task force deployed by Executive Outcomes has received information that UNITA has tasked its Midrand-based advisor to step up his campaign to discredit Executive Outcomes and, in particular, feed this information to a senior SA government official who UNITA is using, albeit indirectly and unwittingly, as an Agent of Influence.[246]

I had known from the very beginning that our contract would involve the retraining of a new national defence force for Angola but a number of journalists tried to create the impression that we were anxious about the integration of UNITA forces into the FAA.

No amount of explaining would convince them that we had known about this long before the signing of the Lusaka Protocol. All they had to do was read our one- page appointment contract signed by General De Matos himself—which had been sent to them. It appeared as though they had never even bothered to look at it.

To implement the protocol and oversee its provisions, a joint commission comprising the UN, the MPLA, and UNITA was established. In support was a troika of observers—the US, Portugal, and Russia.

Additional UN monitors began arriving shortly thereafter. Swaggering about in their tailor-made uniforms and with an arrogance unbecoming to their status, these monitors soon found themselves posted to isolated areas of Angola where their self- importance quickly turned into fear.

Given the UN's dithering in Angola (and elsewhere), many of us viewed their role as a farce (photo: unknown)

Realising that some of the monitors might have been tasked to feedback creative intelligence regarding EO, our signallers set up a UN radio-net interception service that allowed us to listen to their broadcasts.

Knowing that they were too scared even to leave their base camps, it was amusing to hear them reporting their movements and progress to their HQ in Luanda. In the main, UNITA's military actions remained unmentioned. It seemed an odd way to monitor a cease-fire.

Their radio traffic also revealed they had absolutely no grasp of Africa or the situation in Angola—and knew even less about intelligence collection. Some monitors would ask our men to brief them on the current situation and then forward these reports to the UN HQ as their own. Many of these dandies stayed in close proximity to our men, knowing that EO would stand its ground and fight if there was a UNITA attack—something the monitors were either too scared to do themselves or couldn't depend on their own colleagues to do.

Yet their pleas for protection belied the radio signals they sent to their headquarters:

To: UNAVEM HQ (DO) Att: COO CASO

From: Saurimo RHQ.

Subject: weekly report covering period...

The presence of South African mercenaries at Saurimo and Cacolo is a source of concern. Action to repatriate the mercenaries by the Government should be strongly insisted upon.

Despite our general disdain for the UN monitors, a few of them became friendly with my men— something the UN took pains to discourage. Several told us that they were there to monitor the FAA— not UNITA. They often travelled in our aircraft, gladly accepting help and advice from us and generally ignoring the UN's orders to treat us as lepers. A few even travelled to South Africa on our aircraft to visit the homes of their new EO friends.

Their presence didn't prevent isolated violations of the cease-fire agreement. Our intelligence made it clear that UNITA was the cause of most of the infringements. We also had information that they were indeed steadily regrouping their forces and purchasing weapons and equipment. Zaire had, once again, become a secure hub and supply point for UNITA. Watson, the mysterious South African diamond dealer was frequently mentioned by my UNITA agents.

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Nico, Frans Wiegmans, and I flew to Lusaka on 15 January 1995 to attend a board meeting as well as attend the official inauguration of Aquanova Ltd. The official launch took place at the Lusaka polo grounds on 17 January and was attended by a host of Zambian dignitaries and government ministers. I was a guest speaker at the event and received rapturous applause from the Zambians–especially when I mentioned that I was a Zambian by birth. Several of the government ministers asked if EO would consider coming to Zambia to help them train the armed forces there. Several of them were blissfully unaware of their government's covert support to UNITA.

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UNAVEM II's efficacy came under the spotlight on 1 February 1996 when the UN Security Council was presented with a new mandate known as UNAVEM III. Resolution 976 (1995), passed on 8 February, authorised enforcing the cease-fire, policing the Lusaka Protocol, and overseeing the implementation of various other resolutions.

In early February, Lafras suggested a potential new project for the company. Our initial 12-month contract with the FAA had long since expired and the company needed to explore other opportunities. Our telephone discussion would eventually lead to Executive Outcomes' involvement in Sierra Leone.

In March 1995, Lafras, Duncan, Nic, Chris Grové, and I flew to Soyo to conduct an assessment for General João De Matos. We were impressed with the feedback we got, not

only from FAA but also from the multinational companies operating there and the locals, who were most complimentary about the way things were being run by Jannie.

The staff of a local Catholic mission also came to express their gratitude for Jannie's medics who frequently visited them to assist with medical matters.

During March, Cleary penned several so-called 'Confidential Angola Memorandum' documents addressed to EP Gush of the Anglo American Corporation. I was given two of these by Johann Smith. Several positive remarks concerning EO were included in these documents, something Cleary was decidedly unhappy about. On 22 March, Cleary—to counter these remarks—wrote, 'all this renders the machinations of EO still more unfortunate'.

In his 'Confidential Angola Update' of 23 March, Cleary advised Gush that:

A letter sent to Boutros-Ghali [UN Secretary-General] by the Chairperson and Ranking Minority Member of the Africa Subcommittee of the House of Representatives on March 20, [emphasised] the need to apply an arms embargo on both sides, to negotiate the removal of all 'mercenaries', to ensure access for UNAVEM to all parts of Angola (including military facilities), and to investigate and respond promptly to all violations of the Protocol. (Other parts of the letter, the product of negotiations between US Republican and Democrat signatories, are unfortunately less precise!)

I found it significant that Cleary was discussing Executive Outcomes with Gush and speculated about what interests Anglo American might have in Angola. Gush's interest in EO was even more thought-provoking.

At the end of March, Military Intelligence submitted another secret but false intelligence report on EO, which, amongst other things, claimed:

General Tienie Groenewald, under orders from General Viljoen, told Pinox and Jan Breytenbach that they must exchange the case of Cyril Ramposa [sic] for one containing the explosives. Viljoen withdrew the order at the last minute by a fax to Groenewald (a copy of this fax is currently in Pinox's possession as well as Jurg Prinsloo the advocate for the Conservative Party). It has created much friction between Pinox and Groenewald.

The EO contract in the Ivory Coast was arranged by Willem Ratte in cooperation with Jan Breytenbach. It later appeared that the 600 [men] they wanted to recruit were to protect the Caborra Bassa water scheme.

I had absolutely no idea what South African right-wing elements were up to, and found it objectionable that EO had conveniently been lumped together with them in the same report. EO was not negotiating with anybody in the Ivory Coast—or in Mozambique—and we had no men there. Sadly, I was no longer on speaking terms with Willem Ratte.[247] Colonel Jan Breytenbach was of zero importance to me and neither he nor Ratte were ever associated with EO in any manner or form. Once again, MI's aim was clear: they wanted EO presented as a dangerous right-wing organisation that posed a major threat to South Africa's stability. And as the Ivory Coast was a major supporter of UNITA, it seemed they

wanted to imply that we were taking our fight against them there, thus trying to confirm their own claims that we were destabilising Africa.

At around this time, we brought Nic van den Bergh back to South Africa and his position was taken over by Pale van der Walt, another ex-SADF officer. Pale was also appointed as a brigadier. Pale, an ex-paratrooper officer would go on to do sterling work in Angola. It was during this time that our first men were deployed in Sierra Leone, a country that would become the next chapter in Executive Outcomes' history.

On 20 April 1995, Cleary penned another letter to Peter Gush insinuating that EO might be planning something sinister against Savimbi:

...air travel in Africa has delayed the arrival of Sakala, UNITA's Foreign Secretary, by one day...This may have been all to the good as Thabo Mbeki, who is to see him, is also only getting back from Tunis tomorrow morning. With President Mandela resting and promoting registration for the local elections, Nzo in New York for the NPT debate at the UN, and Aziz Pahad with Thabo in Tunis, there were slim pickings available among the political elites...There is a twinge of unease about security as the GRA (MPLA/FAA) intelligence and security personnel (quite understandably) and reportedly (and less understandably) Luitingh of Executive Outcomes, is on his way to Lusaka. An accident at Savimbi's meeting would be highly embarrassing for Chiluba, but less so than one in Luanda would be for the GRA.

I noted that Cleary was further propagating the disinformation that EO was planning to kill Savimbi. At least, the lying finger was now pointed at Lafras and not at me.

In early May, Johann Smith reported that Dr Savimbi would be visiting South Africa. According to Smith, the arrangements had been coordinated by the DFA's Rusty Evans, Sean Cleary, and MI elements. He said the visit was part of a larger Stratcom plan that ranked EO high on the Savimbi agenda.

In May 1995, President dos Santos met Dr Savimbi in Lusaka in an attempt to resolve their differences. The meeting did not bring about any significant change in Savimbi's attitude towards peace.

Writing about this meeting on 7 May, Cleary revealed having had a role in convincing Savimbi on certain aspects:

Savimbi proposed that UNITA would accept the declared result of the elections and abandon the second round of the presidential campaign required in terms of the...(This was prompted by my comments last November ...)

Johann Smith informed me that this particular update had been sent to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, Anglo American, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Military Intelligence. Once again, I tried to get the media to acknowledge Cleary's close links with UNITA, Mbeki, Anglo American, and MI, but they showed no interest.

During May, there was a flurry of letters from Cleary to Gush. These letters not only discussed EO but covered confidential discussions between Savimbi and members of the

South African government.

Cleary's 'Dear Peter' letter to Gush on 13 May 1995 said about Savimbi:

On Monday morning he called me from Zaire, indicating that he would come, but could not arrive before 10 or even 11 May, as he had to... He was to have called me on Tuesday at 1.00 pm to confirm his time of arrival, after which arrangements for his meetings with Thabo Mbeki and Mr Mandela, and for his participation in a special session of the WEF/SADC conference, on Angola, would be made

... I later received a message that Savimbi would send me a message explaining what was happening, but this only arrived on Friday morning ... Beye and Hare, as I mentioned earlier, also 'sensitised' Mr Mandela to the issue of the mercenaries in a private discussion after the formal briefing on 9 May. UNITA formally introduced the need for exclusion of mercenaries—and EO ... Savimbi will, no doubt, discuss this matter further with the South African government in his meetings next week.

In a brief note to Gush dated 25 May, Cleary referred to an article in the New York Times which said in reference to Executive Outcomes: 'The pressure is growing. One is only concerned that the ... analysts here ... notion that they [Executive Outcomes] may have helped to bring the war to an end in Angola... '

On 17 May Dr Jonas Savimbi arrived in South Africa to meet President Nelson Mandela. The carefully orchestrated high-profile visit was designed to convey the impression that Savimbi was the true peacemaker in Angola and that he had the full support of the South African. President dos Santos was not invited.[248] The game being played was very obvious to the MPLA. Savimbi was courted by the South African government and the media alike. This was not Savimbi's first visit to South Africa. He had often travelled to the country as a guest of DFA and MI, albeit secretly.

In an effort to boost Savimbi's continental and international image, he was invited to visit President Mandela. President dos Santos of Angola was not (photo: www.voaportugues.com).

Savimbi also met privately with Sean Cleary where, according to Smith, further plans were hatched to remove EO from Angola and terminate the threat the company posed to

UNITA. Apparently, Cleary also emphasised the need for UNITA to recapture the diamond areas they had lost if they were to sustain their war efforts. Smith went on to tell me that Cleary was keen to advise Savimbi on how to approach and exploit his confidential talks with President Mandela to UNITA's advantage and make Savimbi appear as a true statesman and the 'real' president of Angola. Cleary also kept Gush up to date on the supposedly confidential discussions between Mandela, Mbeki, and Savimbi.

The Angolan General Staff were extremely dismayed by Savimbi's reception in South Africa, which, for them, was a demonstration of how quickly President Mandela and his ANC government had forgotten MPLA's past support. It also proved to them that, notwithstanding denials, South Africa was still extending support to UNITA—support that was about to increase.

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I had by then informed both General De Matos and General Itha that EO had been approached and accepted a contract with the government of Sierra Leone. I wanted them to be aware of the fact that we would still be operating in Africa should they ever need to call on us. I also wanted to pre-empt any disinformation that we were now changing sides to support UNITA—something the media, the DFA, and MI were quite capable of propagating. Several of our men would be deployed directly from Angola to Sierra Leone and I wanted the generals to be aware of our movements. We didn't need any antagonism from the Angolan military authorities if we were going to overfly their territory or land in Luanda for refuelling purposes.

It was then that General De Matos told me he had been approached by members of the Sierra Leone government who had asked for a reference on EO. He had recommended us but told the representatives that, as the commander of the FAA, he was not at liberty to introduce us directly to them.

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In June, FAA intelligence sources, our own network in Saurimo, and my SIG were reporting that masses of weapons, ammunition, fuel, vehicles, and food supplies were being moved to the provinces and stockpiled for a new UNITA offensive. A large portion of these had again been supplied by South Africa. The FAA once again placed its units on a war footing as a precautionary measure.

To the casual observer it appeared that the cease-fire was mostly still holding, but as the Human Rights Watch later reported:

UNITA's procurement pattern initially did not change following the signing of the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994. Arms and oil flowed unabated through Zaire. According to a Human Rights Watch source, on the afternoon of 7 March 1995 a plane belonging to the cargo company ATO,[249] loaded with weapons for UNITA, was seen taking off from Kinshasa's N'djili International Airport bound for Angola. UNITA's use of

ATO was not new. ATO flew three loads of rifles and pistols to UNITA directly from Pretoria in 1994. In early 1995 ATO carried senior UNITA military commanders to Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. ATO owns shares in a Britannia aircraft and also operates DC-3s, DC-6s, and an Ilyushin transport aircraft.

Flights to UNITA in this period did not only carry weapons. They supplied the movement with fuel, food, beer, and medical equipment, and also carried passengers. Because of the sensitivity of such operations, Human Rights Watch was informed that as a matter of practice these cargo companies would file false flight plans. In the second six months of 1995 the number of flights out of Kinshasa to UNITA zones declined. However, the crash of a Trans-Service Airlift flight carrying UNITA personnel[250] just after take-off from Jamba's airport on 18 December 1995 showed the continued use of Kinshasa-based companies. Companies operating out of Kinshasa that have flown into UNITA zones in 1995 were: Trans-Service Airlift (TSA), Trans-Air Cargo (TAC), Guila Air, Express City Cargo, Skydeck, Fil Air and Walt Air.

Ironically, when General Itha had given these same details to the alcohol-soaked South African media delegation we had taken to meet him several months before, they had simply ignored him or assumed he was lying.

Discussing the renewed and frequent flights into UNITA-held territory, I warned Itha that UNITA was readying itself for a new offensive under the ever-watchful eyes of the UN. The UN, however, continued to condemn FAA—the Angolan government forces—and imply that UNITA was a victim of MPLA aggression. I was convinced that peace did not suit their purposes.

On 24 July, Sean Cleary wrote to Peter Gush, claiming, '[General] João De Matos remains highly sceptical about the possibility that the peace process will proceed satisfactorily'. Smith also reported that Cleary had advised Deputy President Thabo Mbeki accordingly and suggested that De Matos was using EO as his own private army to provoke a UNITA attack. Cleary had now turned to the highest authority in South Africa to support his own personal interests, along with those of Savimbi and his high-brow clients, in getting EO out of Angola.

Another round table conference between President dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi took place in Gabon in August 1995. Both leaders once again pledged their commitment to a peaceful Angola and the reconstruction of the country. Yet even as they spoke, UNITA was developing a new campaign strategy and making plans to attack targets in the Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul Provinces to reclaim the diamond rich areas—under the noses of the UN. The UN, in turn, appeared to be ignoring these preparations.

We knew that UNITA's military losses had resulted in much tension within the ranks of its general staff and that they constantly shifted the blame amongst themselves. This inevitably led to the development of different camps—those wanting peace and those wanting to resume the war.

Generals De Matos and Itha were confident that the FAA would now finally be able to match whatever UNITA threw at them. The intelligence that was collected, analysed, and

disseminated was allowing the FAA to second-guess most of UNITA's intentions, making them able to pre-empt and thwart many of UNITA's battle plans. "If UNITA violates the peace agreements we will destroy them once and for all,"

General De Matos said.

"General, if they do," I suggested, "you should mount a campaign to attract UNITA soldiers who no longer wish to fight, and persuade them to lay down their arms under FAA protection. The rest should be isolated, attacked, and annihilated, otherwise forced to surrender."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that, but if it does we'll wipe them off the map," De Matos promised. "It's my duty to ensure that the government and the Angolan people are protected."

I could tell that De Matos was becoming increasingly suspicious of UNITA, but given their duplicity in the past and the numerous battle-indications that were emerging, I was not surprised.

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In July or August 1995, Major Andre van Taak of the SAPS Counter Espionage division asked to meet me to discuss a 'highly sensitive' issue.

Since having met with him to report the UNITA hit team in South Africa, I doubted his integrity. However, I reluctantly agreed to see him at our offices.

Van Taak told me he was running an agent in America's CIA who was working under cover as a journalist. He asked if I would meet with his agent and help him with a story he was doing on EO.

"Why do you need me to help him?" I asked, finding his request somewhat strange.

SAPS Counter Espionage officer, Major Andre van Taak, misled the author when requesting help for an agent of his (photo: LinkedIn)

Van Taak said the man had helped him with delicate information in the past and he wanted to return the favour. He added that the agent believed EO had been treated unfairly by the media and wanted to set the record straight.

The following morning he introduced me to an American by the name of Anthony Lobaido. Despite my hectic schedule, I gave Lobaido several hours of my time, allowed him access to our files, and briefed him on areas he didn't understand— which were numerous. Lobaido, obviously a supporter of South Africa's ultra-right- wing, struck me as a very unlikely CIA agent.

His article was published in The New American on 4 September 1995. It was with something of a shock that I found a photo of myself on the cover and the headline, 'Eeben Barlow's Private War: Executive Outcomes mercenary army invades Angola on behalf of oil, diamonds, and communism'. Apart from his reckless statements about EO having 'invaded' Angola and more, his article consisted of regurgitated lies—and a few new ones of his own.

He even quoted Peter Hammond, 'a former SADF Special Forces operator who now heads Frontline Fellowship'. In fact, Peter Hammond's name once appeared on the SADF Special Forces' Wall of Shame as someone who, despite claims, never served in Special Forces. Apart from this, Hammond[251] allegedly told Lobaido that EO 'has a vast amount of ex-South African, Israeli, Portuguese, and Brazilian mercenaries operating without any ethical restrictions...'[252]

As a self-promoting man of the cloth, Hammond could lie with the best of them. Lobaido also claimed that I was a former Special Forces operator (untrue), that EO had invaded Angola at the behest of the communists (untrue—we were contracted by the legitimate government of Angola), and that we were being paid in diamonds (untrue). His most astonishing allegation was that 'many Afrikaners serving in the National Intelligence Service believe...Executive Outcomes can be traced all the way back to the assassination of apartheid's founder, Hendrik Verwoerd'. The fact that I was barely ten years old at the time of Verwoerd's assassination seemed to have conveniently escaped the attention of Lobaido and his sources.

Lobaido's article was reworked; new 'facts' were added, and it was sold on to other publications. Part of his story was later used as the foundation for a Christian publication's claim that I was the anti-Christ. Lobaido continued to write articles about Executive Outcomes, based on his 'expert opinion' and suitably coloured by his own radical right-wing views.

New American's deceptive cover and article on EO by American right- wing journalist Anthony Lobaido

I was later told that Van Taak had introduced Lobaido to members of Military Intelligence, several journalists with known anti-EO/pro-UNITA sentiments, members of the National Intelligence Service, and Foreign Affairs. I realised I had been duped.

Lobaido would, in later years and with some help from his MI friends, develop the following figment of his imagination into the subsequent misleading piece on his 'blog'. It has since been picked up by many others and has finally become an acceptable mistruth:

When I returned to South Africa in 1995, I was also able to write about Executive Outcomes, a private, mercenary army run by ex-Special Forces members of the SADF. Executive Outcomes fights around Africa and the world on behalf of multinational corporations in search of lucrative mineral rights. Even '60 Minutes' ran a segment on Executive Outcomes, only it came years after my own story, and failed to speak of any of EO's connections to the De Beer's diamond cartel and upper echelons of the Marxist ANC and British government.

After falsely claiming that EO had been sent to Angola by the ANC—and later 'the De Beer's diamond cartel and upper echelons of the Marxist ANC and British government',

he accused EO of being linked to a mysterious Indian, Rakesh Saxena, apparently a friend of Adnan Khasgoggi's. He later also wrote:

UNITA is a Christian movement which understands communism is evil and still a threat to all of Africa, stated South African missionary Peter Hammond in a World Net Daily interview. They have fought for 25 years, and I believe they can still fight for another 25 more.

Van Taak's CIA 'agent' was nothing but a propagandist for whoever supported UNITA —as well as a liar.

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President dos Santos met Dr Savimbi for a third time in Brussels in September at a Round Table donor conference sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Once again, Savimbi appeared merely to be playing for time.

The Angolan government moved closer to ordering pre-emptive strikes against UNITA positions in the Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul Provinces. This had been preceded by a massive intelligence-gathering operation by the FAA and ourselves. Men and weapons were placed on standby to await orders from General De Matos. We knew that UNITA had no intention of honouring the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol. Both the Americans and the UN intervened, and under massive diplomatic pressure, President dos Santos ordered De Matos to stand down the FAA forces, and suspend any aggressive action.

Watched by a gleeful diplomat, President dos Santos and Dr Savimbi meet yet again to discuss peace. Savimbi used every 'peace negotiation' as an opportunity to build up and re-arm his forces (photo: http://adst.org/)

There were still sporadic outbreaks of fighting but many of UNITA's troops in the field were exhausted by the war. After years of riding on the high tide of continuing victories, they had reached the desperate conclusion that they were slowly being whittled away by the FAA. Several UNITA troops defected to the FAA and others fled to Zaire.

An agent in UNITA later described the situation as follows:

Dr Savimbi still believed we could win the war and take control of Angola. He was also certain that through his friends in South Africa, America, Belgium, France, and England he would still be able to convince the world that it was MPLA who was bedevilling the peace process and not UNITA. Some of our generals were unhappy about the decision to reject the MPLA's offer of peace. They had spent many months in the field fighting, latterly usually losing the battles along with a lot of men and materiel.

Such generals felt that the political arm of UNITA desperately wanted to retain control and that it was they who had been behind the rejection of dos Santos' offer. Those of us who had been fighting the FAA in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul now knew we could never win the war. FAA was becoming more confident, more aggressive, and more than willing to do battle with us. On the other hand we were becoming concerned about having to fight the FAA and Executive Outcomes. We were scared and demoralised. When the FAA began massing troops in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul in September 1995, many men deserted. They had lost the will to fight and had no wish to die for nothing.

I felt some sympathy for the UNITA generals because many South African soldiers had also been forced to follow the personal whims of politicians who had no interest in trying to achieve an effective peace. Only a soldier can really know what that feels like.

In a letter to Peter Gush of Anglo American on 8 October 1995, Cleary wrote:

> We arranged a number of meetings in London on Thursday and Friday between one of General João De Matos' confidants and a few of our people... De Matos will not accept FALA's (UNITA's army) integration into the FAA, despite what has been agreed on the political level...Full integration is not possible as De Matos will then not be able to count on the loyalty of the FAA in the event of a return to war...The FAA/Government of the Republic of Angola is determined to secure full control of…'the diamond industry'. This is why the deal was struck with Oderbrecht! FAA/Endiama/Oderbrecht...did not have the expertise or experience to achieve this. De Matos benefits from EO's presence in Angola; it reinforces his strength as they are answerable to him. He thus has no intention of allowing them to be removed...and has factored them into his planning for the reconstitution and training of FAA.

I was again bemused at the great interest that Cleary and Anglo American were showing in Executive Outcomes and Angola. The irony of the situation was not lost on me: was Anglo American paying Cleary to lie to them? Did Gush know that Cleary was lying to him? Were they both interested in diamonds at any cost? Only they knew.

On 9 November, Cleary sent a facsimile message to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki after an article with a more objective and positive assessment of EO's role in Angola had appeared in New Africa. It had obviously terrified the duplicitous Cleary.

His letter to Mbeki read as follows:

Dear Thabo

The ‘facts and figures’ in this New Africa report on Executive Outcomes are rather off the mark, but the article suggests a shift in attitude in the African environment. This will have implications.

Go safely, Sean (Signed)

FACSIMILE MESSAGE

TO: HON. THABO MBEKI
DEPUTY PRESIDENT

FROM: SEAN CLEARY

DATE: NOVEMBER 9, 1995

RE: NEW AFRICA REPORT

Dear Thabo

The 'facts and figures' in this NEW AFRICA report on EO are rather off the mark, but the article suggests a shift in attitude in the African environment. This will have implications.

Go safely

Sean

Sean Cleary’s letter to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki expressing his concern about a more neutral article on EO that had appeared in the New Africa magazine

Cleary was now obviously extremely worried and needed Mbeki to intervene and give credence to his previous lies to Gush and the others who were paying him.

When I questioned Smith about Cleary’s letter to Mbeki, he again revealed that Cleary was planning to establish his own Private Military Company[253] once EO had been shut down and ‘the time was right’.

In late November, General De Matos told me that the FAA would not be extending our contract beyond January 1996. This came as no great surprise as I had discussed the contract with him and General Itha several months before. I had told them I believed the shooting war had been won but would probably restart in the near future. What had initially started out as a one-year contract had already been extended to two years, handled month-by-month for the previous several months.

We had entered the Angolan war with a group of less than 100 men which had grown to about 500. We had trained a demoralised and defeated army and turned the tide of the 20-year-long Angolan war. UNITA’s military forces had been consistently defeated until they were left with only a few isolated pockets of territory deep in the interior. We believed it was only matter of time before they faced total collapse.

We had played a decisive role in achieving peace for the country—something the once mighty SADF had been prevented from doing by political and personal interests. The difference between us and the SADF was that we had assisted the democratically elected

government's forces fighting with their backs to the wall instead of aligning ourselves to a Maoist anti-government force. In that sense, EO had been more successful than the SADF—yet no one had questioned why or at what comparative cost.

When EO finally left Angola in January 1996, we were not thrown out even though the media tried to suggest that we had been. While it was known that the US government was keen to see the last of us in Angola, there were also suspicions that President dos Santos had become victim to US and UN economic and political blackmail. This gained credence when shortly after our departure, an American private military company—MPRI[254]—arrived in Luanda, ostensibly to advise FAA. Their arrival in Angola was part of an overall forced 'deal' offered to President dos Santos by the Clinton Administration and the US Department of State—a deal that required FAA to terminate its contract with EO and promised massive US investment in Angola. MPRI did not last long in Angola—and the massive investments that were promised, didn't arrive.

Our departure from Angola on 12 January was 'supervised' by the UN, and several of its officers congratulated us on the work we had done to end the Angolan conflict. Indeed, several expressed grave concerns about our departure as they considered us a force for stability and not an agent of chaos. I recall my brief but cordial discussion with Zimbabwean General Philip Sibanda, who commanded the UN peacekeeping force in Angola:

> You might have made many enemies in South Africa for what you did here, but you have undoubtedly made many good friends in Angola. Even amongst UNITA there are many good men who believe that you were the catalyst that brought the war to a close. As one soldier to another—I commend you and your men for a job well done.

General de Matos and several of his generals travelled to Cabo Ledo to bid us farewell. Prior to addressing us, he beckoned me aside, and with tears in his eyes, simply shook my hand and hugged me. He had no words to say but that gesture said it all to me. He then delivered a highly emotional farewell speech, thanking the company for what it had achieved. In the presence of the UN representatives tasked to ensure that we actually left Angola, he stated that we had prevented Angola from drifting deeper into anarchy and emphasised the vital role we had played in assisting the FAA to gain victory over UNITA.

General de Matos (right) addresses Angolan troops while the author (left) and General Faćeira look on (photo: www.sabado.pt)

With his eyes misting over he gave Nic van den Bergh and me heart-warming farewell hugs. We reciprocated with lumps in our throats and wished him, the FAA, and the MPLA everything of the best.

Our departure was monitored by several journalists. SAPA reported:

The Angolan military was equally effusive. At a special departure ceremony, Angola's chief of staff General João De Matos described how the mercenaries had been hired in 1993 when government troops were at their lowest ebb—taken by surprise by UNITA's rejection of their election loss in 1992 and return to the war. UNITA had taken 90 municipalities and five provincial capitals. UNITA had 40 000 soldiers then and was ready to march on Luanda, Benguela and Lubango', he said. 'We are eternally grateful and we will help you any time you need us.' De Matos spoke about Executive Outcomes 'fighting alongside the Angolan Armed Forces for the preservation of our independence'.

Under the watchful gaze of UN monitors, the last of our equipment was loaded aboard a Boeing 727 at Cabo Ledo. Some UN officials frantically tried to check our equipment and make notes—which seemed rather pointless as they had absolutely no idea what equipment we owned. Perhaps they were hoping to find tanks and aircraft hidden in our rucksacks.

Several Angolan soldiers standing next to the aircraft wept openly and hugged us goodbye; others softly sang a song of farewell in haunting African close harmony. I finally boarded our plane for its last take-off from Cabo Ledo with great pride and no regrets—except for the reality that some of our men never made it to the end.

Inside the aircraft, two UN officials tried to count the men on board, still having no clue how many EO men had actually been in Angola. General Faćeira pushed them aside, took the microphone, and thanked the men for their courage, dedication, and sacrifice. He was very emotional about us leaving and said that as brothers from Africa, we would always be welcome to return to Angola. He then walked down the aisle and shook every man's hand.

Several years later, Hennie Blaauw told me:

It still makes me angry when I think about those two self-important UN monitors who stalked down the aisle trying to do a head count. We should never even have allowed the bastards onto the aircraft (Oom Hennie levelled this accusation at me as I was the one who had allowed them on board. Had I not, they would probably have claimed that we had misled them).

I was glad that General Faćeira had the balls to take the microphone and thank us for being there in their darkest hour. And I appreciate the way he acknowledged all the sacrifices we had made on FAA's behalf right in front of the so-called monitors.

I remember Faćeira walking back down the aisle towards the tail door of the plane, shaking hands and saying goodbye to us.

I was overcome with immense sadness when we finally took off. As I looked through the window to catch my last glimpse of Cabo Ledo, I almost cried. It was all over, but for how long I wondered?

Several of the men had asked to remain with the company and to be posted to Sierra Leone. Others had chosen to be absorbed back into civilian life and they disappeared from our files. Others resigned from the company and returned to Angola where they quickly found employment with other security companies—some of which would falsely be accused of being Executive Outcomes front companies.

Whatever our circumstances, none of us would ever forget Angola, or the men we left behind.

A FAA BMP crew enjoy a break after the signing of the cease-fire agreement Photo Unknown)

22:
Angola Returns to War

On 1 February 1995, the Secretary-General recommended to the Security Council that UNAVEM III take over from UNAVEM II to help the parties restore peace and achieve national reconciliation. On 8 February, the Security Council authorised the establishment of UNAVEM III with a maximum strength of 7 000 troops and military support personnel, 350 military observers, 260 police observers, some 420 internationally recruited civilian staff, 300 locally recruited staff, and 75 United Nations volunteers. The date envisaged by the Council for the completion of UNAVEM III's mandate was February 1997.[255]

UNAVEM III's priorities were:

1. To provide good offices and mediation to the Angolan parties
2. To monitor and verify the extension of State administration throughout the country and the process of national reconciliation
3. To supervise, control and verify the disengagement of forces and to monitor the cease-fire
4. To verify information received from the Government and UNITA regarding their forces, as well as all troop movements
5. To assist in the establishment of quartering areas
6. To verify the withdrawal, quartering, and demobilisation of UNITA forces
7. To supervise the collection and storage of UNITA armaments
8. To verify the movement of Government forces (FAA) to barracks and the completion of the formation of FAA
9. To verify the free circulation of persons and goods; to verify and monitor the neutrality of the Angolan National Police, the disarming of civilians, the quartering of the rapid reaction police, and security arrangements for UNITA leaders
10. To coordinate, facilitate and support humanitarian activities directly linked to the peace process, as well as participating in mine-clearance activities
11. To declare formally that all essential requirements for the holding of the second round of presidential elections [had] been fulfilled, and to support, verify and monitor the electoral process.

Their much heralded and publicised arrival was supposed to have marked the end of the long, bitter and bloody civil war that had ripped the country to shreds— and place it on a new trajectory towards peace, stability and growth.

We sat back and watched in disbelief as a new crisis unfolded right in front of them. Much of it was kept hidden from the media and therefore went largely unreported.

Jane's Sentinel, a Southern African Newsletter, ran an article titled 'Angola returns to the brink' which stated:

Fears for the stability of the country have also increased as South African professional soldiers of Executive Outcomes (EXO) have begun pulling out, apparently at US State Department insistence (see Southern Africa Sentinel Vol 1 No 5). 'We have been told that the US government wants Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) to take over our training and support roles', a spokesman for EXO [EO] told Jane's Sentinel. 'This, it seems, is the price for further US commercial, political, and humanitarian aid', said a diplomatic source. 'It seems that the pressure was put on [President] dos Santos when he visited Washington last year.' Washington and other Western governments had promised US$1 billion to re-build Angola in December 1994, but little of that money has been received by the Luanda authorities.

During 1996 and the first half of 1997, UNITA built up large stockpiles of weapons and military equipment right under the noses of UNAVEM III who were supposed to have ensured that this wouldn't happen.

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On 9 April 1997, in an attempt at national reconciliation in accordance with the Lusaka Protocol, the Angolan National Assembly accepted 63 UNITA deputies into the government. The new Angolan Government of National Unity (AGNU) was inaugurated two days later.

Dr Jonas Savimbi was noticeably absent, showing his contempt for the new structure (which comprised members of MPLA, UNITA, and the Angolan Democratic Party) by refusing to attend the ceremony.

It had originally been intended to establish the AGNU in January 1997 but it did not materialise because there were several 'major technical failures' during the negotiations. Major factors were the quality and quantity of housing for UNITA politicians and officials, the size of UNITA's 'political security force', and Savimbi's position in government. Savimbi also demanded that UNITA have its own military authority, in effect, an army not incorporated into FAA and that he could use as he wished—a demand the MPLA very sensibly refused to allow.

Savimbi was determined to get his way or, if need be, go to war (again) to get it.

To all who witnessed what was happening, it was obvious that UNAVEM III was failing in its mission. The UN viewed the situation differently and on 30 June 1997 stated:

Recognizing the successful contribution of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) to the restoration of peace and the process of national reconciliation in the country, the Security Council on Monday decided to establish, as of 1 July, the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA). The new follow-on mission [will] replace UNAVEM III.

From afar, I maintained a keen interest in Angola and its worsening situation which I observed through intermittent contact with several of my MI and UNITA agents, and some FAA generals. Their reports about UNITA rearming themselves alarmed me and I tried to

discuss the deteriorating situation with Bertie Jackson of South Africa's Secret Service. He listened sympathetically but told me that South Africa would not interfere in Angola's internal affairs. I found this unconvincing as South Africa had continually interfered, first by giving military support to UNITA— and then by condemning the MPLA for having hired EO to bring about an end to the war. In fact, it was precisely South Africa's vilification of EO that had placed the MPLA under pressure regarding our presence in Angola in the first place.

Barry Gilder listened to what the author had to say regarding EO but didn't believe what he was told (photo: https://twitter.com/bpgilder)

Bertie arranged for me to exchange views with Barry Gilder at an SASS safe house. Although I was anything but happy about the disinformation that had been fed into the NICOC, not to mention the pending disaster about to erupt in Angola, the meeting was conducted in a civil manner. Gilder confirmed what Bertie had told me—South Africa wouldn't interfere in Angola—yet South African citizens and companies were still interfering in Angolan affairs, with or without government approval.

The cease-fire, albeit shaky and regularly violated, had remained in place thus far but in mid-1997, the first confrontations in what became known as Angola's Third Civil War occurred, and a rapid deterioration in relations between the MPLA and UNITA ensued. Aside from the tension on the battlefield and Savimbi's reluctance to put the war behind him, there were several economic and political factors at play and UNITA still appeared to have continuing support from South Africa, the US, the UK, France, and Belgium.

Human Rights Watch would later report on the recommencement of hostilities:

At the end of May 1997, the FAA launched 'an offensive against the armed rebellion in the diamond province of Lunda Norte, resulting in the paralysis of the peace process provided for by the Lusaka agreement'. Although the remaining UNITA forces were officially involved in a disarmament and demobilisation process, they resisted the offensive and fought against the FAA. The increasing number of armed incidents affected

several provinces. Angolans began killing one another again, and in the north-east of the country, fighting lasted for several months. These were concealed by the warring factions and by UN observers who refused to acknowledge that their mission was failing.

Between June and September of 1997, UNITA continued to build up its forces despite the UN's presence. Sporadic armed incidents occurred and tensions between the MPLA and UNITA reached a breaking point. The UN was eventually forced to admit that UNITA had launched several attacks on government positions in Lunda Norte Province. The media didn't show too much interest in these developments.

FAA was eventually forced to retaliate. It launched a series of attacks against UNITA, raided villages housing UNITA troops in Huila Province, and recaptured large tracts of the diamond mining areas. This expanded FAA's control over an area between Dondo and Luena. Other UNITA positions in Bié, Soyo, and Huila Provinces were also attacked. The media now voiced concerns about MPLA/FAA's aggression and their failure to uphold the state and protect Angolan citizens.

The broader peace process and the creation and development of a government of national unity, the demobilisation of UNITA, and the full restoration of the state's administration over all Angolan territory was supposed to have been completed by 28 February 1998, but UNITA had still not fulfilled its obligations by then.

A new deadline was set for 16 March 1998 and this was to be marked by the installation of UNITA's leadership in Luanda. On 6 March UNITA responded by declaring that it had demilitarised all its forces. Despite knowing this declaration to be untrue, the government legalised UNITA as a political party and appointed three UNITA nominations as governors and seven as vice-governors. A list of six ambassadors nominated by UNITA was also approved. On 31 March a law was passed to grant special status to Savimbi as the leader of the largest opposition party. The MPLA was bending over backwards to bring about an end to the conflict and accommodate Savimbi.

By 1 May, UNITA still controlled approximately 60 localities in Angola, including strongholds in Andulo, Bialundo, Nharea, and Mongo. In May 1998 the UN's Beye submitted a new timetable calling for UNITA to hand over the areas under its control by 31 May. Unsurprisingly, Savimbi refused.

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From 1997 to mid-1998, the UN's Special Representative to Angola, Blondin Beye, was absent from the country while receiving treatment for a heart condition. During his long absences the MPLA and UNITA became even more intractable as the political and military situation deteriorated even further.

Negotiations in which the government tried to gain control of UNITA's four strongholds were ongoing while the FAA and UNITA continued to build-up their forces throughout Angola.

On 27 June, Beye was killed in an air crash in Ivory Coast and this resulted in a severe setback in the UN's mediation efforts. He had been on a round of visits to West African

states (including the Ivory Coast, Togo, and Burkina Faso) attempting to dissuade them from continuing to support UNITA. A story that Beye's aircraft had been shot down by UNITA on grounds of him being against the party did the rounds and it was suggested that, with Beye dead, the UN would be unable to intervene to stop UNITA's war plans. UNITA exploited Beye's death and the UN's seeming paralysis by reasserting themselves in several provinces—with some apparent assistance from elements within MI's DST.

On 1 July, new UN sanctions froze UNITA's foreign bank accounts, banned their 'blood' diamond exports (this ban had little to no effect on UNITA's diamond sales), and halted all air and water transport into and out of areas they occupied.

On 2 July UNITA attacked the Posto de Fronteira Nordeste[256] in Lunda Norte, destroyed a village and senselessly killed its 150 inhabitants. On 24 July it launched an assault against Posto Fronteira Muaquesse,[257] destroying another village and murdering more civilians. It also made last-minute changes to the scheduled demobilisation of its troops which were instead deployed in strategic UNITA- controlled locations such as at Dange near Uige and Vinte Cinco near Huambo.

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In neighbouring Zaire, President Mobuto Seso Seko, no longer receiving mass support from the US, was experiencing his own problems—problems that would eventually spill-over into the region.[258] According to the 'Fowler Report':[259]

Until the overthrow of Mobutu in May 1997, UNITA used Zaire as a base for the stockpiling of weapons, and it used Zairian end-user certificates as the means by which arms brokers working for UNITA were able to obtain the weapons Savimbi wanted. Mobutu provided Savimbi with the Zairian end-user certificates, and in exchange Savimbi gave Mobutu diamonds and cash.

Bordering Zaire, Rwanda was already engaged in a civil war between the Hutu-led government and the largely Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). On 6 April 1994, an aircraft carrying the Rwandan President (Juvénal Habyarimana) and the Hutu president of Burundi (Cyprien Ntaryamira) was shot down as it prepared to land in Kigali, killing everyone on board. This appeared to be the catalyst that resulted in the mass killing of members of the Tutsi and Pygmy tribes.[260]

It was common to see bodies piled up like rubbish in Rwanda. This tragedy could have been prevented—but wasn't (photo: Anthony Suau)

The genocide, planned by members of the Rwandan army, the Gendarmerie, and government-backed militias eventually slaughtered approximately 70% of the Tutsi tribe along with approximately 20% of the Pygmy Batwa tribe.

Fleeing Tutsi joined up with Zairian-based Tutsi where the latter had formed a militia to defend themselves against combined Zairian armed forces (FAZ) and Zairian-based Hutu militia forces. In 1996, the Tutsi militias began a rebellion against Mobutu when the government of Zaire, using the FAZ, escalated the massacre of Tutsi living in eastern Zaire.

The Tutsi militia formed a coalition with various opposition groups and gained support from several countries. This coalition, led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, was known as the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre[261] (AFDL). Determined to oust Mobutu, the AFDL made significant military gains in early 1997, and by mid-1997, had almost overrun the country. Its progress was hampered by the country's dilapidated infrastructure. Mobutu, no longer able to call on the US for assistance, entered into peace talks with Kabila. The talks failed and Mobutu fled to Morocco on 17 May.

Kabila consolidated power around himself and the AFDL and appointed himself president. On 20 May, his forces marched to the Capitol unopposed and Zaire was promptly renamed Democratic Republic of Congo. Conflict soon erupted in DRC again as forces loyal to Mobutu began their war against Kabila to reclaim the government.

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In August 1998, the MPLA sent troops supported with armour, artillery, and air elements to the Democratic Republic of Congo to support President Laurent Kabila in the escalating conflict raging there. UNITA had long been assisted by Mobutu of Zaire (now DRC) and the MPLA viewed this move as a strategic one to destroy UNITA's external support bases. The intervention resulted in UNITA losing several supply lines and a disruption of its ability to maintain forces outside Angola. UNITA also lost the use of Kinshasa's airport for its weapon and ammunition supplies, mainly from South Africa.

By then several UNITA politicians had become tired of the constantly changing political landscape and decided to break away and establish their own political party. Jorge Valentim and other senior members announced a split with Savimbi and launched a party called the Renovation Committee of UNITA.[262]

The government said it would negotiate only with this 'new' UNITA and urged others to join them. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) branded Jonas Savimbi a war criminal and threw its support behind the new UNITA, but the new party did not attract strong support inside Angola or outside the SADC. Many of mainstream UNITA's 70 members of parliament disassociated themselves from the group (another thirteen were not in Luanda and two were ill), and many senior officials refused to support the breakaway group in spite of government threats and bribes pressing them to do so.

On 2 September the police raided and took control of UNITA's headquarters in Luanda, allowing only supporters of the Valentim faction to enter the building. Senior police officers said that anyone not with the Valentim faction would be viewed as a 'political criminal'.

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Human Rights Watch continued to detail the ongoing resupply of weapons to UNITA:

Defecting UNITA officials have added details about arms flights into UNITA- held areas in 1997. Major Florentino Sawimbo told Angolan television in August 1997 that "in February, March and April it came from Zaire. For instance, we saw materiel unloaded in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul Provinces. Recently, we have thought that the flights were coming from South Africa." Colonel Sawimbo also claimed that weapons had arrived in Lusamba and Katodi airstrip on the border with Zaire, where war materiel had been unloaded since 1995. In October 1998 another defecting UNITA official, Captain Damba Zau, alleged that Yugoslav- manufactured AK-47 rifles were flown to Andulo, Bailundo, and Maquela do Zombo via South Africa and Morocco[263] in 1998.

A UNITA officer, Colonel Boaventura Vito Cangundo, who was captured by the government in December 1998, reportedly described sanction-busting operations during questioning:

From late 1996 we began to receive from Zaire weapons such as AKs, RPGs, PKMs, AG-l7s, and 82mm mortars. They were packed as if they were second- hand clothing.[264] BMP-2s began to arrive on 1 July 1997 from a country that I did not identify. The supply lines are domestic but in 1997 there were a number of imports from South Africa to Andulo in particular [words indistinct], particularly to purchase SAMIL [South African Military] 100 lorries and tinned food for soldiers.

My intelligence sources within and outside of MI were telling me that UNITA was ready to return to war. I felt compelled to contact General João De Matos and ask if he

wanted us to return to Angola.

"I would certainly like that General Eeben but we can't do it—there are now too many people and organisations watching us. The government has decided that UNITA must be destroyed on the battlefield and that we must fight the war ourselves. Your return would cause enormous international condemnation and we can't afford that at this stage."

"As one friend to another, if you decide that you need us, just call me." That was the last conversation I had with General de Matos.

By 29 September, the military situation was spiralling out of control. It didn't help that the Security Council had decided to postpone the implementation of sanctions against UNITA until 30 October. Resolution 1 135 (1998) was eventually adopted on 29 October when it became clear that UNITA was not even attempting to honour the conditions of the Lusaka Protocol. This resolution imposed travel bans on UNITA officials and ordered the closure of all their international offices. It also resulted in UNITA severing all contact with the MPLA and UN, although I was told there was still clandestine contact between the UN and UNITA.

Tensions between the opposing forces escalated during November and December and resulted in numerous smaller armed actions. On 28 November the FAA captured a few small UNITA-controlled diamond mines.

The MPLA finally lost patience with Savimbi's game-playing and at its 4th Congress in Luanda in December 1988, President dos Santos said there could be no peace while UNITA continued to exist as a military organisation. He called for the termination of the mandate of the United Nations' Mission of Observers in Angola (MONUA) and scrapped the Lusaka Protocol.

To mark the beginning of the congress, the FAA launched a series of pre-emptive strikes with MiG-23s and SU-22s targeting Bailundo and Mungo in central Angola. UNITA forces defended their positions and counter-attacked, inflicting heavy casualties on both FAA units and the local population who UNITA regarded as pro- government. The FAA was forced to withdraw to Huambo and Cuito Cuanavale to reassess their campaign. Smelling victory, UNITA started shelling both cities indiscriminately and caused countless civilian casualties.

In December 1998 and January 1999 respectively, two aircraft chartered by the UN's Mission of Observers in Angola were shot down, killing the passengers and crews. I later learnt on good authority that they had been shot down with missiles supplied by Watson, the South African weapons dealer and diamond buyer. I believed it when both the FAA and UNITA denied responsibility for downing the aircraft.

On 27 January 1999 the National Assembly passed a resolution declaring Jonas Savimbi 'a war criminal and international terrorist' and demanding that he be held accountable for the worsening situation in the country.

Meanwhile, UNITA capitalised on its battlefield successes and proclaimed 1999 to be the year of Generalised Popular Resistance. A communiqué issued on 1 February 1999 stated:

In the progress of the Generalised Popular Resistance against the forces of Jose Eduardo dos Santos, the Standing Committee of UNITA reports on the important military operations during the period of 29 January to 31 January 1999.

1. The Uige Province: On the morning of 30 January the village of Mukaba, situated 38 km north of the city of Uige, was taken without firing a shot. The forces of Eduardo dos Santos disbanded as soon as they noticed that the Generalised Popular Resistance forces were closing in.
2. Province of Zaire: On 30 January the municipality of Kiende, some 25km south-west of the city of M'banza Congo, was taken by storm. Government forces had been withdrawn from M'banza Congo and concentrated at Kiende. In continuing action three motorised military columns of Eduardo dos Santos' forces travelled from Luanda to retake the city of M'banza Congo but they were destroyed. The MPLA troops fled and dispersed towards Luanda.
3. Province of Malanje: On 30 January the military training centre of Kainzure ten kilometres north-east of the city of Malanje and garrisoned by the 2nd Tactical Group of the 33rd Regiment, was taken by storm. During the action 23 soldiers of Eduardo dos Santos were killed. Amongst them was Major Delson, chief commander of that tactical group.
4. Bié Province: On the morning of 31 January the municipality of Kamakupa which had been re-occupied by the 170th Regiment of MPLA forces, was retaken by storm by our forces. Nineteen MPLA soldiers were killed and a complete reserve of fuel for the regiment was recovered.
5. Huambo Province: On 29 January eleven soldiers of Eduardo dos Santos surrendered to the Generalised Popular Resistance. They belonged to the 8th Grouping of the Huambo Garrison. We must point out that many government soldiers in various provinces have been surrendering to the Generalised Popular Resistance. We also report and praise the return to the Generalised Popular Resistance of former UNITA soldiers who had been incorporated in the so-called Angolan Armed Forces under the Lusaka Protocol.
6. Benguela Province: On the morning of 31 January, the village of Monte Belo on the Huambo-Lobito Road 29km from Bocoio was taken by storm. During the action fifteen Government soldiers were killed, among them was Major Castilho Tempo.

In all the actions referred to above, large quantities of war materials were recovered which confirms what we have long been saying which is that the Government of Eduardo dos Santos is our main supplier of war materiel.

Due to the rapidly deteriorating situation—coupled to heavy losses on the battlefield—the FAA forces in DRC were pulled back to Angola. FAA forces were additionally deployed into the Republic of Congo (also known as Congo-Brazzaville) as its president was allowing UNITA to operate across the Congo River—especially from Brazzaville and

Pointe Noire where they used airfields for sanction busting operations. The UN was well aware of this but apparently did nothing to prevent the flow of weapons.

Following Mobutu's overthrow in May 1997, UNITA could no longer rely on DRC to facilitate the movement of arms. Initially it switched to the neighbouring Republic of Congo, but after militias began fighting each other to gain control over the Maya Maya International Airport, UNITA was forced to move its resupply operations to Pointe Noire's airport. This was well known to Western intelligence agencies and the UN, but still nothing was done to expose or prevent the flood of weapons.

Carriers landing at Pointe Noire in September and early October 1997 included several flights by Boeing 707s of Air Atlantic Cargo, a Trans-Service Airlift (TSA) Electra LI 88s (9Q-CCV), and Viscount V744s (9Q-CVF), a Trans-Air Cargo (TAC) Britannia-31 BR31s (9Q-CJH) and Fil Air flights.

In mid-1999 Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and the DRC signed a mutual defence pact and forces from those countries were soon fighting alongside the FAA in Angola. On advice from Department of Foreign Affairs, MI, and their henchmen, South Africa declined to sign the pact.

As Zambia had also provided support for UNITA—and allowed them to run several diamond buying offices in the west of the country—the MPLA switched its diplomatic attentions to Lusaka. Fearing that the FAA might launch pre-emptive strikes into Zambia, the country tightened controls on UNITA which isolated it even more.

On 12 May, UNITA downed an AN-26 aircraft that had been chartered as a commercial flight, using a surface-to-air missile. The crew was captured but the passengers were never heard of again. It was rumoured that they had been executed.

The Security Council, while adopting a resolution on 7 May 1999, expressed alarm at the humanitarian effects of the crisis on the civilian population of Angola and stressed that lasting peace and national reconciliation could only be achieved by a political settlement of the conflict. The council deplored the deteriorating situation and, keen to deflect attention away from their incompetence, claimed it was primarily due to Jonas Savimbi's refusal to comply with obligations under the Lusaka Protocol and relevant Security Council resolutions. It also condemned UNITA's continued, indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, particularly in the cities of Huambo, Kuito (Cuito Cuanavale) and Malanje.

UNITA continued its offensive against the FAA and its actions against the civilian population sparing no one who stood in their path. It became increasingly clear that UNITA was gripped by a sort of 'do or die' attitude as they came under increasing pressure both from within and outside the country.

With casualties growing on both sides, the war dragged on throughout 2000 and 2001.

The FAA retaliated with large-scale attacks against UNITA forces and UNITA casualties and loss of materiel escalated. As FAA slowly regained the upper hand on the battlefield, UNITA units were forced to withdraw to their jungle hideouts in the interior.

Wary of entering into direct confrontation with the FAA, UNITA changed its tactics and started concentrating on traditional hit-and-run guerrilla-style actions. Civilians, towns, and stray vehicles became its prime targets as its bloodletting intensified.

Under increasing military pressure, UNITA was forced to offer its own version of a peace plan to the MPLA, but this was rejected. For the MPLA, the time for negotiation was over. For UNITA, peace could be established by the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol of 1994, or by the total destruction of its military forces.

It became evident that Savimbi was personally heading the all-or-nothing faction and would only stop the war if he got what he wanted without any compromise. The MPLA came to the realisation that the only way to stop the war was to eliminate Savimbi.

On 22 February 2002, the FAA Special Forces Commandos—acting on intelligence gained—launched a daring commando-style raid on the area where Savimbi was in hiding. He was killed during the gun battle that followed.

The Guardian in Britain headlined the dramatic story, 'UNITA leader Savimbi killed by Angolan army'. Casimiro Siona in Luanda and Victoria Brittain reported as follows:

The Angolan army has killed Jonas Savimbi, leader of the UNITA rebel group's fight for power for more than 30 years, the army and government said last night. Savimbi, 67, was America's key ally in Africa during the Cold War and a recipient of substantial CIA aid during the 1980s. Apartheid South Africa armed and aided his UNITA movement and Pretoria's army repeatedly invaded Angola, occupying a large area in the south and sabotaging roads, railways, bridges, electricity, airports, factories and schools.

Only the presence of tens of thousands of Cuban troops supporting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government prevented the apartheid regime and its UNITA proxy from taking power.

Asked yesterday if Savimbi was dead, the Angolan presidential spokesman, Aldemiro de Conceicao, told a Portuguese radio station: 'The government has just released a statement confirming the death of Jonas Savimbi, which occurred today at 3pm in the province of Moxico.'

The government added that it would prepare for an end to Angola's civil war, which first erupted after the country's 1975 independence from Portugal, and said it was ready to fully implement a 1994 peace accord which called for democratic elections.

Savimbi's death means the end of the most destructive guerrilla movement the world has known. For two generations [sic] hundreds of thousands of Angolan peasants were killed, wounded and displaced. Tens of thousands of children, boys and girls, were kidnapped and forced into UNITA's army as porters, sex slaves or fighters. Angola today is in economic and social ruin, despite its oil wealth.

After losing a UN-monitored election in 1992, Savimbi plunged the country back into civil war, reneging on a peace agreement brokered the previous year by the US in which he had pledged to disarm and demobilise his army. UNITA proceeded to shoot down several UN planes delivering humanitarian supplies and in 1998 the UN Secretary-General's special representative, Maitre Alioune Blondin Beye, died in a plane crash.

A UN report in 2000 detailed UNITA's use of diamonds to fuel the war, and the movement was put under strict sanctions. The Organisation of African Unity and the Southern Africa group of countries [SADC] declared Savimbi a war criminal. The Canadian ambassador, Robert Fowler, who was then head of the UN sanctions committee,

forecast that if 'the outside world ceases and desists from providing military assistance to Savimbi, he will not be able to maintain this war'.

But diamond dealers continued to buy from him, despite sanctions.

Savimbi's death was the final catalyst that brought about a new era of peace in Angola. His body was put on display to the media after he was killed by the FAA. Many 'specialists' on EO falsely claimed the company had killed Savimbi (photo: http://stopsy.onehashtag.ph)

That weekend people in Luanda and many other cities celebrated Savimbi's death. His bloody body, still dressed in his trademark green Chinese fatigues, was shown on television both in Angola and internationally.

UNITA had not only lost its leader—it had finally lost the war.

On 4 April the MPLA and UNITA finally agreed to a cease-fire and the Angolan parliament unanimously agreed to grant amnesty to all UNITA soldiers who surrendered.

On 31 December 2002 the British Broadcasting Corporation reported:

Angola began the year 2002 at war. Today there is peace in seventeen of the country's eighteen provinces. The turning point was the death in February of the veteran UNITA rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi.

According to various estimates, the Angolan conflict claimed between 500 000 and two million Angolan lives. Another 500 000 were forced to seek refuge in neighbouring states to avoid the horrors of war. Approximately two million internally displaced people and 100 000 refugees who sought shelter in other countries have since returned to their villages and cities. The true human cost of the conflict in Angola will probably never be known.

The UN, through UNAVEM III and at a cost of countless lives and millions of dollars, had still not come to the realisation that there can be no peacekeeping if there is no peace.

At the time of writing, I was directly approached by illegal diamond sellers operating from Angola, asking my help in selling their diamonds.

"UNITA needs the money to buy equipment," I was told. Will Angola ever truly know peace?

Only time will tell.

Gen J De Matos welcomes a UNITA officer into FAA (Photo unmultimedia.org)

23:
Epilogue to the Angolan War: Blood Diamonds and Blood Money

While Executive Outcomes was active in Angola between 1993 and 1996, there were numerous reports about various people and organisations in South Africa providing illegal military support to UNITA in direct contravention of the UN arms embargo. Some of the players were initially part of the SADF's secret Project Spyker/Silver and later went on to carve out their own private deals with UNITA.

Spyker and Silver, run from the National Defence Budget's secret fund, were covert projects that supplied UNITA with arms, ammunition, training; and strategic, operational, and tactical advice.

The objectives became blurred in 1986 when UNITA's training areas in the Caprivi Strip in Namibia were used to train so-called 'death squads' for the Inkatha Freedom Party. After having been trained, these operatives were relocated to KwaZulu-Natal with directives to neutralise the ANC and its surrogate, United Democratic Front (UDF). The ANC retaliated by establishing its own self-defence units. The clashes that resulted led to the deaths of thousands of innocent people and this SADF- orchestrated legacy lingers to this day.

Within Military Intelligence's Chief Directorate of Intelligence Operations (CDIO) headed by General Neels van Tonder, was the Directorate of Special Tasks (DST). It consisted of two divisions: DST 1 (responsible for the destabilisation of Mozambique through the rebel movement RENAMO) and DST2, (tasked to destabilise Angola by supporting UNITA). Project Altar secretly funded DST 1, and DST 2 was funded by Project Spyker—which, apparently, was only officially terminated in mid-to late-1994 while EO was supporting the MPLA's FAA. In Angola, EO became DST 2's direct target via UNITA. The myriad reports—many submitted by MI's Sub Division of Counter Intelligence (SDCI)—that came into my hands throughout our involvement in Angola made this obvious.

I became aware of illegal activities originating in South Africa or being run by South Africans in support of Savimbi's UNITA through agents in my Strategic Intelligence Group. Attempts to make the media aware of such activities by passing them detailed intelligence failed. The facts were simply discounted or ignored by journalists who preferred the official press releases and briefings, and a secret cloak of protection appeared to hang around any individual or organisation that supported UNITA.

General Itha, chief of the FAA's Intelligence Service, provided the South African media with proof of illegal sales and delivery of arms to UNITA from South Africa comprising precise details of illegal flights from South Africa, and the registration numbers of South African-based aircraft that had landed in UNITA-held areas. Again, the information was disregarded by an almost scornful media.

I was well aware, from discussions with Johann Smith, that Sean Cleary was actively giving Dr Jonas Savimbi political and other advice. I also had letters from Cleary

addressed to then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Peter Gush of the Anglo American Corporation—all aimed at placing EO in an unfavourable light and seeking government intervention that would bring about the closure of the company. Cleary also contributed to books on Angola by Jakkie Cilliers' mainly foreign-funded Institute of Security Studies (ISS)—where he again took every opportunity to smear EO and promote his own agenda.

Smith told me, on numerous occasions, that Cleary and ex-SADF Colonel Fred Rindel—another staunch UNITA ally—were 'good friends'. It was only when I was writing this book that a former officer (who had served in DST 2) told me Cleary had accompanied them to Angola to meet senior UNITA officials on several occasions. He also claimed that Cleary had been 'well paid' by Project Spyker. This confirmed what Lieutenant General 'Witkop' Badenhorst had told me about Cleary.

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On 17 January 1995, the British House of Commons introduced an 'Early Day Motion', aimed at condemning EO's role in Angola. I found the British government's concerns about EO having been engaged by the MPLA (and their apparent apprehension regarding the pending military defeat of UNITA) perplexing; Angola had never been a British colony. I had to wonder if this motion was the result of the impact UNITA's loss of Angola's diamond mines would have on the London-based, De Beer's owned, Central Selling Organisation (CSO)—which controlled the global flow of diamonds.

The British House of Commons introduced a motion condemning EO's role in Angola (photo: openDemocracy.com)

When I questioned Johann Smith a few days later, he told me UNITA's pending defeat was a major cause for concern by numerous interested parties in South Africa, from government departments to major business corporations. DFA had become so alarmed that they too had now apparently established a special 'EO desk'. Its aim, according to Johann, was to intensify and coordinate intelligence collection on EO. He also told me:

Sean [Cleary] used his contacts in the British government to rush this motion through when there would be very few people in the House of Commons to counter it. The aim of

the motion was to ensure some form of international criminalisation and condemnation of Executive Outcomes and to try to get this to spill over to South Africa. Of course, [President] Mandela would, if the Brits passed such a motion, support them and condemn you.

Coupled to this is the fact that the Department of Foreign Affairs is running a massive Stratcom[265] against you. A DFA guy by the name of Blume is coordinating the whole thing. He and Sean know each other fairly well and are in regular contact. With everyone working so hard against you and the company, you've been fucked from the start.

I knew that Cleary was penning regular letters about EO to Anglo American's Peter Gush. Anglo American, a majority shareholder in De Beers, was dependent on diamond sales.[266] My contract with Debswana had been terminated retrospectively when it became known that EO had been contracted by the MPLA to train FAA— and after I had declined the offer of US$ 20 million to withdraw EO from Angola. UNITA, in turn, was funding and sustaining its war by mining and selling diamonds illegally—and many of these were finding their way to South Africa. As EO's newly- trained FAA units began putting UNITA under increasing pressure on the battlefield, Cleary's letters became more desperate and he eventually turned to Thabo Mbeki to intervene in EO's contract. I didn't think this was coincidental.

In his desperation to stop EO, Cleary turned to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki for support (photo: Daily Maverick)

I also had to wonder if the SADF's involvement in Angola had had more to do with diamonds than with the proclaimed 'Red Tide'. It made me think of an old saying I had once heard:[267] Create a problem that scares people, and simultaneously, offer them a solution.

In late January, I issued a press release through our attorneys, which in part said:

By using his influence, Savimbi's advisor had his contacts in the British Government introduce an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons on 17 January 1995. This motion was raised using UNITA disinformation in an attempt to drag the British Government into the UNITA arena in hope that it would have a spill-over effect into the South African government.

... A 'new desk',[268] has allegedly been established by an Intelligence Service to conduct operations and intelligence gathering against Executive Outcomes. This comes after the new Deputy Minister of Intelligence, Mr Nhlanhla, stated that there will be no more spying on South African citizens.

... The Stratcom is based on the premise that as long as instability reigns on the African continent, certain people can make money. As EO has prevented these people from lining their pockets, it has become a corporation that must be stopped at all costs.

The media again showed no interest in this press release, preferring instead to keep promoting the DFA and MI's well-established agendas and narratives—agendas and narratives that were benefitting people who were keeping Angola in a state of conflict by trafficking arms and trading in blood diamonds.

On 7 February 1996, Smith handed me a document titled 'Strategic Review Angola 1996' which he claimed Cleary had just finalised for Savimbi. The document stated its 'intent of a strategic review... to allow for development of a realistic goal and subsidiary objectives for the organisation [UNITA] and an effective strategy to achieve them'. The document also detailed how President Nelson Mandela and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki could be manipulated to help UNITA achieve these aims. According to Smith, Cleary was equally alarmed about our presence in Sierra Leone and intended to see that Executive Outcomes was forced to close its doors— especially as the company's activities in Angola negatively impacted his major diamond buying clients, including De Beers Diamond Corporation.

In March 2000, the South African media finally made tentative moves to expose what had really happened in Angola. It averred that Joe and Ronnie de Decker of De Decker Diamonds stood accused of having broken UN sanctions imposed against UNITA by trading weapons and diamonds with them; and that they had sold the 'conflict' diamonds to De Beers Consolidated. De Beers was quick to deny the accusations. This also explained Cleary's continued letters to Gush and his extreme concern regarding EO's presence in Angola.

During his budget vote on 15 March 2000, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad commented: 'De Beers, which is the main buyer of diamonds in the world, in 1999 ceased buying any Angolan diamonds and have committed themselves to introduce realistic measures to deal with illegal diamonds'. In fact, De Beers only ceased its diamond-buying operations in Angola shortly before the MPLA/UNITA cease-fire, and in 2007, De Beers approached Angola in an endeavour to obtain more diamond concessions.

It appeared that the media was finally willing to deviate from their deceptive narrative as on the same day a SAPA report titled, 'UN tells of diamonds for arms deals between SA men and UNITA' stated:

Diamond parcels worth up to US$5 million changed hands in arms deals between two South African brothers and the Angolan rebel movement UNITA, the United Nations has found. A UN report on sanctions busting in support of UNITA— released in Pretoria on Wednesday—said the arms sold this way mainly came from Eastern Europe.

UNITA procured much of its military equipment in 1993 and 1994 from the two brothers, Ronnie and Joe de Decker. Ronnie, who went by the name of Watson,[269] continued being a source of supply until at least 1997. The two brothers are among five South African nationals named in the report by the Angola sanctions committee of the UN Security Council. A panel of experts compiled the document after a six month investigation into transgressions of the UN fuel, arms, travel, financial and diamond trade embargo against UNITA.

The report found Watson procured arms and military equipment for UNITA while Joe handled the financial side of the transactions. Joe currently runs De Decker Diamonds in South Africa. 'Typically, the De Decker brothers would travel together to Andulo (a UNITA base) using a LR35 Lear Jet', the report said. 'Once Watson had finished negotiating the arms component of the deal, Joe would sit together with UNITA's own diamond experts to value the diamond packages that UNITA presented for payment generally packaged in parcels worth between US4 million and US5 million. Sometimes Watson would take the packages to Antwerp, Belgium, and come back with a lower counterproposal on the value of the diamonds, claiming this was all he could get in Antwerp.'

The arms Watson sold to UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi included mortar bombs, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, grenades, small arms, and ammunition. Most came from Eastern Europe. Watson also procured medicines for UNITA. In 1994, he arranged for foreign instructors to train UNITA soldiers on the use of the SAM-16 missile system. 'However, in 1994 or 1995, Watson was reported to have begun having difficulties supplying certain types of lethal equipment... and Savimbi increasingly began to look to other brokers', the report said. UNITA continued to use Watson as a source of supply for lethal and non-lethal military equipment at least until 1997, and perhaps afterwards."

Another South African national, Piet Hand, [Piet Hand was the alias used by Piet Cronje, a man who was fired by EO for attempting to smuggle diamonds] was helping to launder UNITA diamonds, the UN panel found. Working from Johannesburg, Hand was reported to have contacts with a number of licensed small mine operators in South Africa. He was laundering UNITA diamonds by mixing them with stones produced from these small mines. 'Of particular interest was a technique whereby diamonds are half polished in order to conceal their origin, and make them [look] similar to local semi-processed stones', the report said; Hand had also organised diamond sales for UNITA through a South African jewellery company.

The fourth South African mentioned in UNITA's supply chain is Johannes Parfirio Parreira. A former UNITA general told the UN team that Parreira had sold 50 000 pairs of military boots to UNITA, as well as socks and vehicles. He had also been at the centre of a network of illicit UNITA suppliers, using his air charter company, Interstate Airways.

“Parreira is said to have a number of passports, and currently to be based in South Africa after having been forced to leave Namibia”, the report said.

Parreira was arrested in Zambia for sanctions busting but jumped bail and fled the country. In 1998, he was reportedly detained in Angola after his aircraft was forced down. He later escaped. The last South African named in the report is transport operator Jacques ‘Kiki’ Lemaire, who provided aircraft to carry weapons destined for UNITA to Kinshasa. Lemaire remained active in the transport business, operating in southern and central Africa, the UN report said.

On 22 February 2001, during a sitting in the UN Security Council in which the arms and diamond industries in Africa were discussed, the speaker, Ms Lee of Singapore stated:

Clearly, the arms and diamonds industries have spawned a very profitable war economy, such that the diamonds industry, which was the resource for the arms, has in turn generated an arms industry to protect the diamonds. It is a stalemate that has a high price: violence for economic control. ..

We are here today to review the recommendations of the Mechanism on the effectiveness of the implementation of the many sanctions against UNITA and to consider appropriate action against the sanctions-busters...

In the case of the diamonds sanctions, modes of circumvention similar to those being used in the Sierra Leone sanctions as described in the Ayafor report appear to have been used to conceal the true origin of diamonds from UNITA mines. These include the potential loopholes found in the Swiss tax free zones. However, a serious allegation was made in paragraph 181 of the Mechanism’s report: that well-known clients of De Beers are knowingly buying rough diamonds from UNITA. This and other questionable methods uncovered by the Mechanism require further investigation as to the validity of the findings.

On the issue of sanctions busting the report mentions familiar names. On the use of aircraft for sanctions busting, Victor Bout has been identified as a key player, as has Air Cess. The countries named in the report as being the countries of origin for arms exports to UNITA, and those accused of complicity in permitting the forging of end-user certificates for arms imports, should address the issues raised in the report.

What was most disturbing in the Mechanism’s report were the common criminals mentioned, namely Victor Bout, Fred Rindel, and the European network connection—‘common’ because they appeared to be the same individuals named in the Ayafor report[270] for activities linked to trade in illicit diamonds and arms with Sierra Leone.

If sanctions busters continue to be ‘rewarded’ and not punished for their acts, the damage will not be limited to the exploitation of resources. It will undermine the credibility of the UN itself. The sanctions imposed against UNITA were supposed to have been a Security Council tool for carrying out its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Victor Bout[271] was the first East European arms merchant to be publicly identified—the UN investigative team claimed he was pouring equipment, weapons, and ammunition into Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the Congo. This was one of the factors that made possible the horrifying massacres in Rwanda, prolonged the war in Angola, and led to the RUF's campaign of terror in Sierra Leone. Armscor's role in this same issue was conveniently and quietly forgotten.

In a 'Top Secret' report titled, 'An intelligence report on South Africa' dated 2001, it was alleged that ex-Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, had been very closely associated with Victor Bout and had assisted Bout in supplying weapons to UNITA— something Bout had admitted to. In retrospect, it is both disturbing and ironic that South Africans working for or closely cooperating with the Military Intelligence Division and the Department of Foreign Affairs were advising UNITA on how to counter Executive Outcomes, and even supplying them with the weapons and advice to do it in exchange for diamonds. At the same time MI and other services were feeding the South African government lies and disinformation to support UNITA.

I often wonder how many of my men died in Angola because of their greed and treachery.

Reportedly a close friend of Magnus Malan's, Bout delivered weapons to UNITA. He was arrested for arms trafficking in Thailand in 2008 (photo: CS Monitor)

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Alan Cowell, writing for The New York Times, on 22 August 2000 published a lengthy article[272] that confirmed suspicions I had long harboured:

A little over a year ago, De Beers, the mining colossus straddling the world's diamond trade, confronted double jeopardy. Human rights groups were accusing it of buying illicit diamonds from African rebels and rulers who used the proceeds to help pay for their wars. The essential mystique of its product, nurtured over decades of artful image-building and brawny cartel management, seemed threatened by association with these so-called blood diamonds.

The article went on:

As managers and consultants wrestled with the company's makeover, the drumbeat from critics assailing its often-denied ties to Angolan rebels was growing louder.

''De Beers came under a huge amount of pressure,'' said Charmian Gooch, a specialist on the diamond industry at Global Witness, the group that initiated pressure against De Beers. ''They have only moved because they have been hit on the head repeatedly.''

An article written by Mungo Soggot on 8 November 2002[273] stated:

Conflict diamonds got their start in 1992 in the bush war of Angola, where UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, seeking new ways to finance his army, looked to the country's vast diamond fields to extend the smuggling business that his rebel movement had pioneered in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1993, Savimbi had in place the world's largest diamond smuggling network, netting hundreds of million dollars a year with which he bought arms. Among those companies dealing with Savimbi's diamonds was the South African company, De Decker Diamonds, which admitted selling the diamonds directly to De Beers. De Beers has acknowledged doing business with De Decker, but has said it never knowingly bought diamonds from UNITA.

The involvement of De Beers, the De Dekker Brothers, Rindel and others didn't surprise me at all. I also finally knew why Debswana had cancelled my covert training to their operatives in Botswana.

My Strategic Intelligence Summary had reported on Fred Rindel as far back as February 1994.

The majority of diamonds are marketed via South African companies ... on behalf of UNITA ... being De Decker Diamonds ... Fred Rindel of ... plays a major role in…

It was only in late 2005 that I finally discovered the full extent of the support going to UNITA, particularly by Rindel and others. The UN Security Council's Final Report of the Monitoring Mechanism of Angola Sanctions issued on 21 December 2000, inter alia, stated the following:

1. The Security Council, through resolutions 864/1993, 1127/l 997 and 1173/1998 imposed sanctions against the Uniao Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola [UNITA] led by Jonas Savimbi, with the view to promoting a political settlement to the long conflict in Angola by requiring UNITA to comply with the obligations that it committed itself to when it signed the Bicesse Peace Accords of 1991 and the Lusaka Protocol of 1994 limiting UNITA's ability to pursue its objectives by military means. These sanctions prohibit: the sale or delivery of arms and military equipment to UNITA; the provision of petroleum products to UNITA; and the purchase of diamonds mined in areas controlled by UNITA; require the freezing of

UNITA bank accounts and financial assets and mandate the closing of UNITA representation offices as well as restrictions on travel of senior UNITA officials and adult members of their immediate families.

2. Desirous to strengthen the implementation of these sanctions, the Security Council, by resolution 1237/1999 of 7 May 1999, established an independent Panel of Experts and mandated it to establish how sanctions against UNITA were being violated, who was violating them, and what could be done to make the sanctions more effective. In its ground-breaking report to the Council of 10 March 2000 (S/2000/203), the Panel of Experts revealed its findings on how the sanctions against UNITA were being violated and made extensive recommendations on how the sanctions regime could be further strengthened.

The report went on to state:

24. Upon completion of its investigations, the Panel of Experts presented a report broadly depicting the methodology resorted to by UNITA in building up a significant military capability in breach of Security Council sanctions (S/2000/203). The report highlighted the role of arms suppliers based in Bulgaria and Ukraine in supplying military equipment to UNITA. It also noted the role, until 1997, of countries such as Zaire, and later Togo and Burkina Faso, in the provision of the proper documentation required for the purchase of arms, that is end-user certificates, as well as facilities for the storage and transit of weapons. Finally the report cited the active participation of individuals acting as arms brokers in the procurement chain...

118. There are pilots with military training and combat experience (often from eastern Europe and southern Africa), who, as individuals and entrepreneurs, are prepared to undertake such activities. Individuals such as Johnny Pereira have been identified as pilots who in the past have flown sanctions busting missions in Angola...

119. Landing heavy cargo planes with illicit cargoes in war conditions and breaking international embargoes such as the one on Angola requires more than individual effort. It takes an internationally organised network of individuals, well-funded, well connected and well versed in brokering and logistics, with the ability to move illicit cargo around the world without raising the suspicions of the law or with the ability to deal with obstacles. One organisation, headed, or at least to all appearances outwardly controlled by an Eastern European, Victor Bout, is such an organisation.

150. Although UNITA has been mining diamonds since the 1980s, it was only following occupation of the Cuango Valley in November 1992 that the movement began producing diamonds in very large quantities. These built the income for UNITA's rearmament process and also helped pay for the war between 1993 and 1994, following UNITA's rejection of the United Nations sponsored election 153. Since the De Beers' Central Selling Organisation bought the majority of the diamonds produced and put out the figures for their 'open market' purchases, the figures for diamond values have some

credibility. Ashton Mining of Australia, a partner in the consortium now mining the Cuango, estimated that diamonds valued at $2 billion were removed from the Cuango during this period. Since UNITA had other mines in the Lundas, an overall figure of $3 billion between 1993 and 1998 inclusive is not farfetched, though not all of this accrued to UNITA directly. The Mechanism has a more exhaustive analysis available but in the interests of brevity it has been omitted.

161. UNITA brought other players into Luzamba as well, offering smaller mines in return for support. The De Decker brothers had one of these mines and a similar dual role to that of the Cuango Mining Corporation, both brokering diamonds and mining, although the mining was on a much smaller scale. They worked with UNITA on the same production-sharing basis outlined above, with UNITA taking up to 60 per cent of the diamonds.
162. The Mechanism has established that the broker known as 'Watson', who was named in the report of the Panel of Experts as Ronnie De Decker, is in fact Fred Rindel, formerly an officer in the South African Defence Force. The Mechanism brought photographs of several men to Angola. General Bandua, who had previously identified 'Watson' as a brother of the De Deckers', was asked if he could recognize any of the men as 'Watson'. He unhesitatingly recognised Rindel as Watson in front of witnesses. He failed to recognize Ronnie De Decker, who

was named as "Watson' by the Panel of Experts. The Mechanism accepts the identification of Rindel as 'Watson'.

163. Rindel was contacted by the Mechanism and has admitted business dealings with UNITA. The account given by the Expert Panel of the De Decker's diamond dealings with UNITA stands. Fred Rindel and the De Decker brothers set up UNITA's diamond sales system in 1993, selling about one third of UNITA's diamonds according to Rindel. Rindel was given the diamonds by Jonas Savimbi; the brothers evaluated the worth of the diamonds and accompanied him and Rindel would return with the money and sales documents. As previously publicly admitted by the De Decker brothers, these diamonds were sold to the De Beers Diamdel buying offices in Antwerp and Tel Aviv... "
164. 'Watson' was identified in the report of the Panel of Experts as UNITA's main arms dealer during the post-election war. Rindel has denied that he dealt in arms or military aid for UNITA. The Mechanism believes that Watson's role needs further investigation.

I finally knew the identity of Watson—the man who had supplied UNITA with the surface-to air missiles that had targeted aircraft being flown by EO pilots. It was inconceivable that Fred Rindel (a former military attaché) would not know Sean Cleary and Rusty Evans, the Director General of Foreign Affairs. Indeed, Johann Smith had on numerous occasions told me they had a close relationship.

I now also knew why MI had generated a report claiming that EO had shot down one of its own pilots—they needed to cover their tracks: not only were they providing arms and equipment to UNITA in exchange for diamonds, they needed to deflect suspicion away from themselves.

Pres Mobutu of Zaire played a large role in UNITA's weapons- for-diamonds deals (Photo AFP)

24:
The Tragedy of Sierra Leone

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a small West African country on the gulf of Guinea. As early as the mid-17th century, the best harbour on this coast became one of the major shipment points for the transportation of slaves—mainly to North America, where their rice-farming skills made them a particularly valuable commodity. Many of these slaves were also sent to Britain and other European countries.

The territory was ceded to Great Britain in 1787 and that year 400 freed slaves were repatriated. The freed-men called the area Province of Freedom and their first settlement became known as Freetown—today the capital of Sierra Leone. The number of emancipated slaves swelled as new groups were sent to Freetown even though many of them originated from different places in Africa.

Over generations in captivity, the former slaves had adopted western cultural norms and soon built a flourishing trade on the African west coast. The indigenous peoples of Sierra Leone were suspicious of these culturally and linguistically different returnees—referred to as 'Krio'—who never fully integrated, and preferred to align themselves with their British masters rather than with the local peoples.

Intent on becoming masters of their own destiny, the indigenous peoples mounted several unsuccessful revolts against British rule and Krio domination. These were brutally suppressed, but throughout most of the 20th century this small British colony was peaceful.

When, in April 1961, Sierra Leone gained independence through a process of negotiation, many regarded it as a future model state for Africa. But this was not to be. While the country was rich in natural resources—its untold mineral wealth included diamonds, deposits of rutile (an important source of titanium), iron ore, and bauxite—it was incapable of exploiting these and there was widespread poverty. The exploitation and management of its riches was left to foreigners, mainly from Britain and other parts of Europe.

In 1971 Sierra Leone declared itself a republic. Successive governments were dominated by a small political elite who made huge profits for themselves and little was ploughed back to improve the living standards of the vast majority of the population. This inevitably led to anger and discontent which eventually bubbled over into violence. The model state was balancing on a knife edge.

In neighbouring Liberia, following a coup d'état and a subsequent election that was widely considered to be fraudulent, former government minister Charles Taylor started an uprising intended to topple the government. In 1989, Taylor prevailed on Colonel Gaddafi to have his rebel forces trained in Libya. When the training was complete, Taylor travelled to Sierra Leone and asked President Joseph Saidu Momoh[274] to allow him to establish rear bases there from which to launch his revolution into Liberia. Not only was his request refused (the Mano River Union[275] Protocol (MRU) prohibited member states from

interfering in the internal affairs of other members) he was arrested and incarcerated in Sierra Leone's maximum security prison at Pademba Road.

Map of Sierra Leone (source: Ezilon.com)

Notwithstanding this, President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah[276] later alleged that the government of the day had taken money from Taylor to regard his request favourably. The bribe seems to have worked because Taylor was released from prison and the rebellion in Liberia commenced shortly afterwards.

In 1990 the Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group[277] (ECOMOG)—mainly comprising Nigerian forces—initiated Operation Liberty to quell the Liberian insurgency, and were successful in preventing Taylor's incursion from Sierra Leone to Liberia's capital, Monrovia. Taylor bitterly resented the interference which he interpreted as a calculated move to prevent him from becoming president of Liberia. He also saw Sierra Leone as a major player in ECOMOG's successes.

Participating in the Liberian conflict was a rebel group established by Krahn[278] refugees and soldiers known as the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which claimed it was fighting for a democratic Liberia. In its ranks were also fighters from the Mandingo ethnic group.[279] In late 1991 it scored significant gains in the diamond mining areas in western Liberia. ULIMO was initially sympathetic to both the Sierra Leone rebels and Liberian rebels, who it believed were fighting for a similar cause. Sensing that it was not going to become a major party in ending the Liberian Civil War or indeed gain a place in a Liberian government, ULIMO relocated back to Sierra Leone. It is possible that the ECOMOG forces had an influence on their decision to leave Liberia sometime in 1993. In Sierra Leone, ULIMO now fought alongside the Sierra Leone army against the rebels.

While deployed in Liberia, ECOMOG earned itself the nickname of 'Every Car Or Moving Object Gone' since ECOMOG soldiers suffered from low morale and a lack of measurable morality, and were susceptible to bribes, theft, and general crime.

As Tarty Teh, a Liberian editorialist, wrote about ECOMOG's presence there:

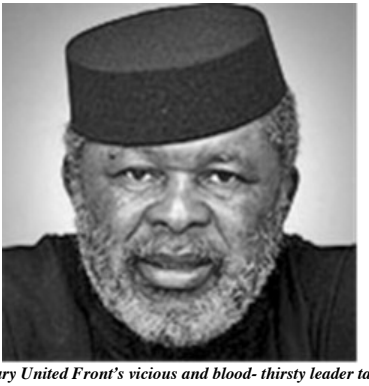
During the Liberian operation, stealing became such a habit for the average ECOMOG soldier that theft replaced restoration of order as ECOMOG's mission. At some point, Liberians had to find some balance in the whole mess as reason for putting up with the putrid ECOMOG. Monrovia residents watched their cars and refrigerators being loaded onto ships bound for Nigeria, and thanked God that at least their houses were not burned down. At that time the search for valuables worth shipping home became a time-consuming task ahead of peacekeeping for the average ECOMOG soldier.

It can be argued that once a thief, always a thief, but then what about the negotiating table which called for civilian administrators who were not pressed by the need for mere survival? Well, for that there was a separate breed of crooks who met with then rebel leader Charles Taylor ahead of each negotiating session for instructions on what the deal would be. ECOMOG therefore was not much better on the negotiating table, because of what often passed under the table.

In early 1991, in an interview with the BBC, Taylor[280] vented his anger and disappointment with Sierra Leone and vowed that the country would 'taste the bitterness of war'. He would eventually honour his threat.

Liberia's rebel leader, Charles Taylor, one of the RUF's primary sponsors, was also a US DIA agent. He vowed to bring chaos to Sierra Leone and kept his promise (photo: BBC)

Sierra Leone, however, had its own ruthless rebels—the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by ex-Sierra Leone Army (SLA) corporal and television cameraman Foday Sankoh, another product of the Libyan school of revolution. The RUF quickly gained popularity with those who resented the corrupt Freetown elite and believed the RUF's promises regarding equitable sharing of diamond revenues, free education, and health care. When Sankoh approached Taylor requesting to be allowed to train his men in captured Liberian territory, Taylor agreed and provided Sankoh with recruits (Sierra Leoneans captured in Liberia) and trainers from his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) commandos. The recruits were known as RUF vanguards.[281]



Foday Sankoh, the Revolutionary United Front's vicious and blood- thirsty leader tasked his armed gangs to roam the countryside and commit mass atrocities (photo: BBC)

On 23 March 1991, Sankoh's RUF began an armed insurrection which would lead to a full-scale terrorist action and civil war.

The RUF began by attacking Bomaru and followed up in other towns and villages. Among the attackers were large numbers of Taylor's men: National Patriotic Front of Liberia fighters outnumbered their RUF counterparts by four to one.

As one Sierra Leone researcher pointed out, 'Those Liberian NPFL fighters never took orders from Sankoh, but from Taylor or NPFL commanders'. Taylor and his men were in complete control of operations in the initial stages and it has been suggested that Sierra Leoneans were merely there to lend an indigenous flavour to the incursions.

Years later, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) found, on investigation, that fighters from Burkina Faso (known as Burkinabes) had also been involved on the RUF side in the early stages of the conflict.[282]

The Liberians and Burkinabes were trained guerrillas, experienced from having fought in Liberia, and both groups devised crude strategies to enlist new fighters, including child combatants. One such method included forcing children to kill their parents in full view of local communities. The rationale was that these children, haunted by their actions, would have to stay with the rebels to avoid imprisonment. The Liberians and Burkinabes also engaged in cannibalism.

Sierra Leone collapsed into a state of civil war characterised by anarchy, terrorism, murder, and torture as rebels and renegade government soldiers waged a war of terror against civilians who did not support their cause. Their campaign of terror was later expanded against all civilians in their path. They robbed and torched villages, hacked people to death, and chopped off (and ate) hands, feet, or genitals. What had initially been an insurrection directed at the Freetown government and its elite, degenerated into murderous blood-letting. But they did have an ultimate objective—to take control of the diamond mines in the east of the country.

In late 1991, at the request of the Sierra Leone government, Nigeria sent a small force charged to guard military bases and installations. Apart from formal requests or protocols for military assistance, the socio-cultural ties between the two countries had their genesis in the abolition of slavery and the establishment of Freetown as a haven for emancipated slaves. Having been freed from British Naval boats bound for the New World, a number of slaves from Nigeria had resettled in Freetown. President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria spoke about this 'blood relationship' between Nigerians and Sierra Leoneans as being the foundation and justification for Nigeria's military and diplomatic intervention in Sierra Leone.

The desire to give an objective West African flavour to ECOMOG's deployment in Liberia was another reason for Nigeria's deployment of troops to Sierra Leone. It also freed up a token contingent of Nigerian soldiers from Sierra Leone to be sent to the ECOMOG mission in Liberia. Nigeria, a key participant in Operation Liberty, wanted to be recognised as the driver for peace in West Africa.

In 1992, a young infantry officer, Captain Valentine Esegragbo Melvine Strasser, known simply as Valentine Strasser, found himself in Sierra Leone's dense jungles fighting against RUF rebels. The young captain was disillusioned because he and his soldiers were

not getting regular pay. He decided to rectify their salary problems and in April 1992, he led his men on a march against his government in Freetown to demand payment.

The president, Joseph Momoh, fearing that he was about to become the victim of a coup d'état, fled as Strasser and his men approached.

All that was left for Captain Strasser to do was march into Momoh's office, occupy his chair and desk, change the décor, proclaim himself president, and start running the country. Strasser quickly consolidated his position; he appointed himself Chairman of the Supreme Council of State, head of the National Provisional Ruling

Captain President Strasser shortly after seizing power and becoming the President of Sierra Leone (photo: unknown)

Council (NPRC), and promised to expel the rebels from the country forthwith.

The NPRC embarked on a mass recruitment drive and thousands of impoverished youths with little or no formal education soon found themselves in the army.

The international media clamoured to meet this new young president who had taken the reins of power and would hopefully bring an end to the suffering in Sierra Leone. The dashing young man was soon introduced to the Queen of England, Prime Minister John Major, South Africa's Nelson Mandela, and even President Clinton of the United States. In spite of all opposition to coups d'états in the West and at the UN, Strasser was suddenly the flavour of the month.

Eight months after installing himself as the head of the National Provisional Ruling Council, Strasser, the West's favourite young president, decided to rid himself of his political opponents and executed 26 people opposed to his rule. They were simply lined up on a beach at Freetown and shot by firing squad. In spite of the Western condemnation that followed, the situation soon took another turn for the worse when members of the Sierra Leone Army decided to apply their own rules in the war against the rebels.

Masquerading as rebels, the soldiers were soon conducting a campaign of terror against the civilian population in efforts to boost their meagre salaries. Referred to as 'Sobels' (soldiers by day and rebels by night) they tortured, raped and murdered whoever and whenever they pleased. Strasser lost all control over his army as commanders defined their

own agendas and discipline broke down. Apart from expressing indignation at the ever-worsening situation, the West failed to put an end to the horror in Sierra Leone.

The RUF took over Kono—the country's main diamond-producing area— depriving the government of much-needed revenue and making it almost impossible for Strasser to continue funding his war efforts. In the meanwhile, the Sobels continued to attack civilians, and anyone who dared oppose them had their feet and hands hacked off. Others became moving targets for bayonet practice or ended up being boiled and eaten.

In an attempt to restore a semblance of security in Sierra Leone and as a counter to RUF activities, an increased ECOMOG force was deployed into the country in 1993. ECOMOG's presence was, effectively, characterised by 'mission creep',[283] and its presence proved totally ineffective. The West nevertheless applauded the appearance of a stabilising force.

By the beginning of 1994, disciplinary problems caused by factional fighting in the ranks of the United Liberation Movement (ULIMO)—now based in Sierra Leone and fighting with the army against the RUF—took its toll on the organisation's prosecution of the war. There was a dispute between two ULIMO commanders, Kapeh and Youlou (members of the Krahn and Mandingo tribes respectively). These differences were primarily related to tribal leaderships and loyalties as both men wanted to be in command of ULIMO. Colonel Tom Nyuma, NPRC secretary of state for the Eastern province, called a meeting to settle the dispute and animosity.

At the meeting Youlou expressed his dislike for Kapeh and soon afterwards ordered ULIMO's Mandingo fighters to kill him. Kapeh tried to escape but was slaughtered. After this incident all ULIMO personnel operating in the country were disarmed by the Sierra Leone Army contingent at Waterloo and taken to Allen Town camp at Mayami.

Sierra Leone's young military president became increasingly isolated by the international and African communities and the situation deteriorated to such an extent that Sierra Leone was described as the epicentre of anarchy in West Africa. In his 1994 Atlantic Monthly article 'The coming anarchy', Robert Kaplan wrote:

Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring in West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, the empowerment of private armies and the growing pervasiveness of war. West Africa, he [Strasser] predicted, 'provides an appropriate introduction to the issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilisation.

The international community showed no inclination to step into the breach to restore law and order, and merely watched the ensuing chaos dispassionately. The US was still smarting from the humiliation of having seen bare-footed Somalis dragging dead American soldiers through the streets of Mogadishu; and the UN had not forgotten the impunity with which the Bosnian Serb Army had taken its peacekeepers hostage and used them as human shields. The memory of how easily the Rwandan génocidaires had murdered Belgian peacekeepers was also fresh in the minds of the UN. They wanted no

part of Sierra Leone's growing chaos and seem to have hoped that by closing their eyes and drinking tea, they could make the situation go away.

In November 1994, Strasser, acting in desperation, wrote to the UN Secretary- General asking him to facilitate negotiations between his government and the RUF. In mid-December, the UN Security Council responded by sending an 'exploratory mission' across the country.

Two months later, following the mission's report, Berhanu Dinka of Ethiopia was appointed Special Envoy to Sierra Leone with a mandate to facilitate negotiations between the government and the RUF, and return Sierra Leone to civilian rule. His presence, however, did nothing to stop the RUF's terror campaign, and the negotiations soon collapsed. By the end of the year the RUF had brought the war to the doorstep of the capital, Freetown, by capturing Newton.[284]

Increasingly nervous and realising how precarious his situation was, Valentine Strasser asked the RUF to cease hostilities and promised amnesty to the rebels. Sankoh turned down the request and the RUF escalated its murderous rampage.

Despite its untold mineral reserves, immense forests of great beauty, magnificent beaches, and warm climate, the belief that Sierra Leone would blossom into a flower of great African beauty was fast becoming a terrifying pipe dream. The rich diamond areas in the east had become a bloody curse and the magnificent jungles were a safe haven to the RUF and whatever horrors they could dream up. With rebels and Sobels vying for power and the ruling elite up to its neck in corruption, Strasser realised he had to do something.

As Ian Douglas of the Institute of Security Studies wrote in the Institute's book, Peace, Profit and Plunder:

Strategically, the RUF depended on outside support from Libya, Guinea and Liberia, while tactically, it depended upon guerrilla tactics, foraging, and the capture of arms and equipment from the RSLMF which was weak, poorly led and seemed prone to flee on contact.

In 1995 with the RUF literally knocking on the doors of Freetown, Strasser looked first to the outside world for military and security aid.[285] Seeking to ensure a continued flow of revenue, the British government introduced him to a private military company employing Gurkhas to assist in securing the country's principal diamond and titanium oxide mines against the raiders.

The Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) were sub-contracted into Sierra Leone by J & S Franklin Limited, a UK-based company with close ties to Strasser's government. GSG's head office was in St. Helier, Jersey, in the Channel Islands. As its name suggests it was composed of former crack troops from that most famous of British mercenary sources, the Gurkhas of Nepal.

At the time of their recruitment GSG's management apparently said: "Gurkhas are good in Africa, because they are used to hardship, don't get bored like Europeans, are

courteous, disciplined and are not expensive. They are also apolitical—they serve their client and don't get involved in asking why."

This statement would soon be proved very wrong.

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The contingent of 58 Ghurkhas and three European managers commanded by American Major Robert Callen (Bob) Mackenzie, arrived in Sierra Leone in February 1995. Mackenzie was a Vietnam veteran who had served in the Rhodesian SAS, in El Salvador, and in Bosnia. He was also the son-in-law of former CIA assistant director Ray Cline.

GSG's tasks were to train the presidential guard and Sierra Leone's armed forces in counter-insurgency techniques, and to safeguard the Camp Charlie military base at Mile 91. In the meantime, the National Provisional Ruling Council had acquired two Russian Mi-24 helicopter gunships with private Belarussian crews, which attacked a number of RUF bases. The GSG refused to conduct offensive operations against the RUF, however, arguing that these were not in their contract.

The battle that resulted in the departure of GSG from Sierra Leone apparently occurred by accident.

On 24 February 1995, Bob Mackenzie, a GSG reconnaissance team, and a platoon of Sierra Leone infantrymen, were looking for a remote area of jungle where field- firing exercises could be conducted. They unintentionally bumped into the RUF and, during the ensuing firefight, Major Anbou Tarawali (President Strasser's Aide-De- Camps), Bob Mackenzie, and nineteen other men in the group were killed. Most of the bodies, including Mackenzie's, were never recovered. There is strong evidence that some of them were eaten by the rebels.

The remaining GSG men left the country shortly afterwards. A captured RUF rebel later described the action:

It was morning time. We were listening to a radio message, to announce promotions. Then we were called out of the base, and then ordered back in. Two jets came to bombard. But we knew the air raid was not the thing, that ground forces would come, so we were ready. They told us they [Gurkhas] are coming. We began to fight seriously. It was not an ambush.'

Did you see the Gurkha commander [Mackenzie]?'

There was one white man. He had compass, camera, gun. He was hit, and then killed. We dragged his body back to camp. We saw he had a tattoo on his arm. They cut the arm off, to show the tattoo to identify the person, to prove to the government that he had been killed. We buried Tarawali. After that attack the commanders decided to move the camp. After one week the jets came to bombard but we had left the camp site by then.

It was against this backdrop of violence and corruption that Lafras Luitingh called me on the phone sometime in February 1995.

I was, at that time, in Kuala Lumpur meeting with members of the Renong Corporation who were seeking advice about getting involved in business in Africa. Although the meetings in Malaysia went well, no subsequent business ever emanated from them.

Sierra Leone was a different story.

Author with the sergeant of the guard, Kuala Lumpar, Malaysia

25:
Help us Save Sierra Leone

"Tony Buckingham has been trying to get hold of you and he eventually called me. He wants to know if we would be willing to go to Sierra Leone," Lafras said to me on the phone.

"What connection has Buckingham got there?" I asked. I was a little taken aback by Lafras' question as I knew from General de Matos that President Strasser had already enquired about us, but no contact had, as yet, come directly from either the Sierra Leone government or an intermediary.

"He's been talking to some guys from an Australian mining company called Sierra Rutile. They heard that he had been instrumental in introducing us to the Angolan government. They seem to think the president there needs help."

"Have these Sierra Rutile guys got a mandate from the president?" I asked, knowing the government of President Strasser was in desperate need for help.

"I don't know. Why don't we meet them and find out?" Lafras responded.

A few days later we met Buckingham in his office at Plaza 107 in Chelsea, London,[286] where he introduced us to an Australian called Brian who was a senior manager at Sierra Rutile. Brian told us about the chaos that was enveloping Sierra Leone, the problems facing President Strasser, and the rapidly dwindling economy. The rebels were close to Freetown and he predicted that within three months they would enter the city and burn it to the ground—after killing, torturing, and boiling and eating everyone who stood in their path. Brian's company needed stability to be able to continue their mining operations which, according to him, was sorely lacking.

"Would you guys be prepared to talk to President Strasser?" he asked, after giving us his summation of the situation.

Lafras and I agreed to go along provided Buckingham came with us. "Why do you need me to tag along?" he asked with a laugh.

"Well, for a start, you introduced us to Brian. Secondly, you're better qualified to assess whether or not they'll be able to pay for our services," I said promptly.

With that, Brian agreed to arrange a meeting with President Valentine Strasser in Freetown.

Buckingham would discuss the financial issues, and if need be, try to find someone or some organisation to pay for our services. Lafras and I would discuss the military aspects of our possible involvement and (if Strasser agreed) the movement of our personnel to Freetown and their tasks when they got there.

After the meeting Lafras and I went to the hotel he was staying at and he briefly summarised what we had been told.

"We know that the rebels are a serious problem for Valentine Strasser. According to Brian they are whipping the government forces and in all probability they'll soon overrun

Freetown. Brian reckons corruption is rife and the distinction between rebels and soldiers is often blurred."

We both wondered why the foreign training the army had been given was proving so useless and ineffectual. I would later realise that most African armies were—and still are—trained to fail by their so-called foreign friends.

I expressed my disquiet; not only had Sierra Leone become another African conflict zone ignored by the world, it was also known that some of the government ministers and military personnel masqueraded as ministers or soldiers by day and rebel supporters by night. Depending on the time of day one would never know who one was negotiating with.

"I don't think we need to worry about that," Lafras said. "I doubt Buckingham would have agreed to go with us if he felt there was a hidden agenda. Nor do I think Brian is in England to ask for help in overthrowing Strasser's government. I think he's playing straight with us".

"Okay," I agreed. "Let's at least go and talk to Strasser. If he decides to hire us we'll have to deploy a training-cum-fighting force, especially in the initial phases. I guess we can forget about shaking the stigma of being mercenaries out to seize Africa's diamond reserves."

"When will you be free to go to Freetown?" Lafras asked.

I was about to travel to Europe to meet with a potential government client so I suggested we waste no time, and recommended that Lafras travel to Sierra Leone as soon as the meeting was confirmed. If I was able to, I would join him there. He was to meet with President Strasser, consider the possible options, and upon us linking up again, we would develop the military options and present a proposal to the government of Sierra Leone. Given the size of the country, we both agreed that we would be engaging on a much smaller scale than we had in Angola.

I flew to Zurich for secret talks with an American academic who lectured at Egypt's Cairo University. He wanted me to engage with the Taliban, a newly-emerged fundamentalist militia movement comprising mainly Sunni-Moslem theological students that was, at that time, waging a holy war (jihad) within Afghanistan.[287]

The academic (I cannot recall his name) wanted to broker a military training agreement between EO and the Taliban to put them in a position to oust the Mujahideen government in Kabul.

During the late 1970s the Mujahideen had probably been the best-known armed Islamic group outside of the Middle East. It had consisted of several loosely aligned Afghan opposition groups that had rebelled and taken up arms against the pro- Soviet government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).

During the 1979 to 1989 war in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had brought forces into the country to aid the government, and the Mujahedeen had received moral and

At a secret meeting in Zurich, an American academic asked the author to commit EO to Afghanistan to train the Taliban (photo: VOA)

materiel support from the West. This war had eventually resulted in the seven main Mujahedeen parties becoming allied as the political bloc that referred to itself as the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahedeen.

I was now being asked to assist and support the Taliban.[288]

"The United States has given the Taliban its full support and I'll arrange the necessary guarantees for your company's fees," the academic assured me.

I was well aware that America supported the Taliban, but I declined the lucrative contract and made it clear that EO would never involve itself in a war with religious overtones or give military training to an organisation hoping to overthrow a recognised government, no matter how bad the international community considered that government to be. No amount of money would change my mind; nor would promises of more US-sanctioned contracts. Besides, not understanding the political and religious dynamics in Afghanistan would have placed EO at a disadvantage.

I furthermore had my suspicions that the contract was a US-orchestrated attempt to lure us out of Angola. I knew the Americans would probably disapprove if EO answered Strasser's call for help in Sierra Leone.

I also considered the possibility that the US had already formulated a long- term strategic plan for Afghanistan[289] in which we would end up as scapegoats. The potential risks were—apart from our own principles of client selection—simply too great to even consider.

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Lafras flew to Freetown where he, Buckingham, and Michael Grunberg (Buckingham's financial manager and the financial consultant of Branch Mining) met Strasser in his Freetown palace. After some discussion, Strasser accepted Lafras' observations and comments, and a verbal proposal for EO's future role. Buckingham and Grunberg would be involved in the financial aspects and they pledged to ensure the funding required.[290]

On my return to South Africa, Lafras briefed me on his meeting with Strasser.

He had given the president various options for defeating the RUF, but Strasser— under massive domestic and international pressure, and struggling to keep his failing government together—had been unsure of himself and indecisive as a result.

"Mr President," Lafras had said, "it's your balls that are on the table, not mine."

Lafras told me that Strasser had taken some time to mull this over, and then looked at him with a smile before answering.

"Okay, go ahead and sort it out but remember that now it's your balls on the table. But please help us save Sierra Leone."

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Back in South Africa, Nico and I discussed the possible contract and I voiced my thoughts and concerns:

Strasser's government had seized power by means of a military coup and the UN, despite its initial apparent support, now viewed it with a great deal of suspicion. On the other hand, the UN had shown its incompetence by merely watching as civilians were slaughtered by various armed factions.

Sierra Leone had a history of tension along its borders, especially with Liberia. The rebels in Liberia were apparently being supported by Libya. In addition, there were several 'respectable' diamond companies buying uncut diamonds from the rebels. This in turn gave the rebels the financial muscle to fund the war. Sierra Leone was rich in diamonds and if we went there, the media would probably claim that our purpose was to mine and extract diamonds, just as they had done when we were in Angola. As we suspected these claims had all originated in South Africa in any case, we could deal with that problem when we faced it.

Given the fact that Strasser and his government were against the ropes, Executive Outcomes would have to engage itself in offensive combat operations in order to secure Freetown and establish a safe base to work from. For that, we would need not only manpower that we could rely on in a combat situation, but also offensive air support and the capacity to deploy and resupply our men on the ground rapidly.

The only way to bring the conflict to an end would be to launch an aggressive offensive operation, take the pressure off Freetown, and then seize the diamond fields to deny the rebels their funding. Then we would need to seize the initiative, put the rebels on the run, maintain operational momentum, and essentially force them to the negotiating table.

To sustain our men logistically would require a massive effort from South Africa.

"How do you think the UN will react to this?" Nico asked.

"Same as they have always done…jump up and down about us being there, condemn us, throw their toys out of their cots, drink tea, and once again prove just how useless they really are by doing nothing but talking. They can't boast a successful track record anywhere in Africa. Since no one really wants to resolve the problems in Africa, we'll

have to rely on ourselves to do it. After all, it's our continent and we don't need outsiders taking care of our security."

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The RUF's Corporal Foday Sankoh's pronouncements made it clear that he visualised himself becoming the new president within a few weeks. The number of innocents his men would murder to achieve that goal didn't concern him, and the UN and the West were remarkably silent about the daily atrocities being committed by the RUF.

Tension had been mounting steadily, especially near the capital. It had already been reported, on 9 April 1995—prior to our arrival in Sierra Leone, that the rebels were massing their forces. According to a press report:

RUF rebels sneaked around army positions in broad daylight Saturday to attack the town of Newton, their closest strike to the capital so far, a senior military officer said on Sunday. The officer said about 150 rebels armed with AK-47 automatic rifles attacked the town, about 35 miles from Freetown, but were driven back by government forces backed by Guinean troops and heavy artillery. He said only two paramilitary police and thirteen rebels were killed. Three rebels in paramilitary police uniforms were captured and identified as deserters, he said. At Waterloo, thousands of Liberian refugees had abandoned their camp and were sleeping at a disused railway station which is nearer the main road, military sources reported. There was no evidence to support claims by RUF spokesman Alimamy Sankoh in Ivory Coast that there was fighting in Waterloo and that the rebels had reached Freetown's eastern suburbs.

On 11 April, in an attempt to quell the rising panic in Freetown, the Sierra Leone Army commander issued a press release:

Sierra Leone Army chief Brigadier Julius Maada Bio said Tuesday evening that the RUF rebels do not have the forces to capture Freetown.[291] He said that tension had risen since the attack on Newton last weekend, but that frightening the population is a tactic of guerrilla war. 'Infiltration is always one of the main strategies terrorists use to wreak havoc on unsuspecting civilians, thereby bringing about the associated loss of confidence in the ability of the army to protect them', Bio said. 'Nonetheless, the army has mounted various aggressive operations within the affected area which have brought about huge successes.'

Speaking from Ivory Coast, Alimamy Sankoh, the RUF's public relations officer, called on foreign diplomats to leave Freetown, saying an attack on the capital was imminent. Embassies said they were monitoring the situation, but had no immediate plans to evacuate. The RUF, which was holding ten Europeans hostage,[292] called for Nigerian, Guinean, and other foreign troops to leave Sierra Leone before they would talk to the military government.

The UN's inertia was shocking: despite the systematic gunning down of civilians in their homes, the hacking off of limbs, the ambushing of civilian vehicles, the boiling and eating of people, and the general mayhem, the lack of international outrage was deafening.

Lafras, Nic van den Bergh, and Nico Palm had already started working on plans for the deployment of our men to Sierra Leone and the subsequent work that would be required, either to bring an end to the war or start negotiations between the warring parties.

Our logistical team under Dries Hanekom's command would be faced with a task far more daunting than Angola. The increased length of our logistical lines was also a major consideration.

We had never had the luxury of a traditional military supply system that allowed five support men for every one man in the field. We'd had to turn traditional military thinking on its head as far as logistical support was concerned. Dries and his few loggies would now have to sustain operations in both Angola and Sierra Leone. Dries wasn't paid to explain his problems—I only wanted to hear solutions and neither he nor his men ever disappointed me. Living and working by our unofficial motto ('Fit in or fuck off') they attacked their new mission with an enthusiasm already well known to us, some days working a full 24 hours to make sure our logistical supply line kept our men sustained.

In brief, the basic operational plan to assist the beleaguered President Strasser and the people of Sierra Leone entailed:

- Flying an advance party (comprising combat specialists well versed in the art of war and the application of tactics on the ground) to Freetown. Their task would be to pave the way for the rest of the team.
- Once there, the advance party would begin preparations to relieve rebel pressure on Freetown and to shore up its defences. While this was in progress, the first SLA troops would commence training under EO control.
- After Freetown had been secured, the first strategic target would be the diamond mining area of Kono and its surrounds. Its loss would deny the RUF funding to continue the war.
- Once this was achieved, the rebels would be tracked down, attacked and destroyed piecemeal.
- As in Angola, EO would help the local people wherever possible. This had worked well for us in Angola—once the population was on our side, they would provide us with critical intelligence relating to rebel camps and movements and the rebels would be doomed.
- Since we had virtually no reliable intelligence regarding the situation on the ground, the entire plan provided for the exploitation of intelligence provided by the local population, flexibility and aggressive action. To achieve this we needed to establish a command element, a training element, an intelligence element, and a rapid-reaction force to attack and neutralise any RUF actions.

We realised only too well that diamonds were being smuggled out of Sierra Leone, not only by rebels, but also by elements of foreign governments and large multinational business corporations. Such players would not be at all happy about EO's arrival; after

Angola they had to know it would only be a matter of time before they lost access to cheap 'conflict' or 'blood' diamonds.

Our contract with Strasser's NPRC required us to provide between 150 and 200 men supported by helicopters. We were to help the SLA drive the RUF from Freetown and its environs, stabilise the area around the capital, regain control of the diamond areas at Kono, help to stabilise the whole country, and train the army as well as a militia. We were also to provide logistical and communications support and assist the army with transportation requirements.

We could again expect the South African Department of Foreign Affairs and Military Intelligence to spearhead a major disinformation campaign against us through the media. We knew we would be loudly condemned no matter what we did, but I also believed that Director General Rusty Evans and his men were acting on orders from elsewhere, and that the agendas of those people had nothing to do with achieving peace in Africa. Evans had already shown an unhealthy interest in UNITA's rebel-controlled diamond fields in Angola —he would probably regard the rebel-controlled fields in Sierra Leone in the same light.

Diamonds—the fuel that drove the UNITA and RUF terror campaigns. The media would falsely claim that this is how EO was being paid
(photo: Afrika News)

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In early 1995, a copy of the Department of Foreign Affairs' 'Intelligence Digest'—a classified composite intelligence document for circulation amongst the directors general of all government departments— contained a wildly defamatory allegation about me having been responsible for the infamous bombing of the US embassy in Beirut in 1983. The document asserted that I had been deployed under deep cover in Europe and the Middle East at the time. The DFA's attempt to have me viewed as an enemy of the US and an international terrorist was not lost on me.

The fact that I had been attending the SADF's Combat Team Commander's course at the Army Battle School at Lohatla in the Northern Cape at the time was of no consequence to the originators of the document. But who cared about such trivial anomalies?

I can only suggest that whoever was responsible for generating that entry never thought I would be in a position to question their 'intelligence'. The lie was, as usual, fed to the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee so that further action could be taken against me.

A senior SAPS officer who at that time served on the NICOC later told me:

You must remember that this document was compiled by various intelligence agencies and state departments with the aim of providing departmental heads with an overview of available intelligence relating to the country at the time.

We would have no idea who the sources of this so-called intelligence were or where it originated from. We would read the document and take note of the contents. It is pretty obvious that whoever fed that information into the system, resulting in it being placed in the Director General's Digest, obviously had a good and substantial reason for wanting to smear and discredit you.

It was an unwritten government policy, supported by various organisations and individuals, to stop you and your company as quickly as possible but particularly you.

Whatever the motives were of those who wished to close down Executive Outcomes and ensure the longevity of anarchy in West Africa—or in Angola—we would forge ahead and honour our contracts, regardless of internal or international opinion. Our mission in Angola was almost complete and we believed that we had honoured every part of our agreement with the Angolans. We were not about to let Sierra Leone be any different.

Many of the self-appointed experts on Executive Outcomes speculated that our men saw themselves as the 'saviours of Africa' and were trying to atone for 'war crimes' they had committed while serving under the former apartheid government's SADF. This was absolute nonsense. They were merely professional soldiers finding ways to do the job they knew best after having been betrayed by their own government. If anyone had taken the trouble to research the SADF in detail, they would have come to the conclusion that the SADF, although an instrument of politics, had never attempted to dictate South Africa's policies. The same can be said of the ANC's MK—they too were implementing policies. As EO had several MK members in its ranks, no mention, conveniently or not, was made of them 'atoning' for 'war crimes' they had committed.

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Lafras quietly gathered the men he had identified for the project.

Duncan Rykaard would assume temporary command until Bert Sachse—our commander of choice—became available.[293] As an ex-Special Forces soldier who had twice commanded the elite 5-Reconnaissance Regiment, Bert was more than well-qualified for the task. He had seen many years of action with the Rhodesian African

Duncan Rykaard was chosen to take temporary command of the EO deployment into Sierra Leone

Rifles, the Rhodesian SAS, and the Rhodesian Selous Scouts, and later as a SADF Special Forces operator in Mozambique and Angola. As a young officer at Britain's Royal Military College at Sandhurst, Bert had been awarded the coveted Sword of Honour as the best student.

Duncan would also initially be responsible for planning while Renier Hugo (also known as PP) would be responsible for operations. Renier, another ex-Special Forces operator, was also amply qualified. Supporting them would be Roelf van Heerden and Andy Brown. I had first met Andy in 1979 when he was a company commander with 53 Infantry Battalion in South West Africa.

Others on the team were Jos Grobler, one of the stalwarts during the advance on Cafunfu, as well as Arthur Walker and Carl Alberts, two of our trusty Mi-17 pilots who would be given their conversion to fly Mi-24 gunships in Freetown. The remainder of the men were all ex-SADF or ex-Umkhonto we Sizwe members, or Koevoet operatives who had been retrenched and were without work. Some were reassigned to Sierra Leone from the Angolan contingent.

Regardless of world opinion, the expected media fall-out, MI's lies, the DFA's disinformation campaign, and whatever other problems we would face, we were now ready to deploy to Sierra Leone.

26:
Move to Mile 91

In mid-January 1995, a King Air aircraft carrying several passengers departed Lanseria airport for Cabo Ledo. On board were Lafras Luitingh, Bert Sachse, Roelf van Heerden, Iwan van der Merwe, and Andy Brown. The King Air made a refuelling stop at Cabo Ledo, promptly took off again, and made another refuelling stop at Libreville, Gabon.

Only after they had departed Libreville did Lafras tell them they were en route to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Bert, still a serving officer in the newly established SANDF, had been earmarked to command our forces in Sierra Leone, and had taken leave to view and consider his posting in EO. Roelf, a man who had not only lived through the dark days of Soyo but been an active participant in the 16 Brigade advance on Cafunfu, would later take command of a crucial EO element in the diamond mining areas to the east of Freetown—in particular Eastern Province's Kono District. Iwan van der Merwe had kept our communications systems functioning through the hell of Soyo, and I had first met Andy Brown in 1979/80 when he was a company commander with 53 Infantry Battalion in the South West African theatre. He would initially fulfil the role of intelligence officer as Carl Dietz was still actively engaged in Angola and could not be spared to make the trip.

Having been introduced to the hierarchy of command in Sierra Leone, the EO party departed again for South Africa and redeployment into Angola until such time as EO's payment[294] had been guaranteed.

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Unable to withstand the murderous Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) onslaught against the country and its people, the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) had some time previously reached out to General De Matos in Angola to gauge his opinion of Executive Outcomes and to determine if he thought EO would be willing to engage with the Government of Sierra Leone.[295] This discussion had previously been conveyed to me by General De Matos.

An agreement to deploy EO into Sierra Leone had been reached during Lafras' first visit with President Strasser, and payment for our services was soon thereafter guaranteed by Tony Buckingham, Sierra Rutile, and several other mining operators who had been awarded concessions in lieu of payments. This would, (especially in the initial stages of EO's deployment) enable us to pay staff and secure vital equipment and services until such time as the Government of Sierra Leone was able to do so.

Although selling mining concessions to mining operators had long been a common practice in numerous African and Far Eastern countries when it came to raising funds, I realised that it would soon be claimed that we ourselves were being rewarded with concessions. Indeed, I reasoned that it would probably be claimed that we had invaded

Sierra Leone to claim its rich diamond fields for ourselves. Time proved my reasoning to be mostly correct.

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In late April 1995, Roelf van Heerden and Andy Brown quietly left Saurimo and headed for Freetown, Sierra Leone, via Pretoria. Apart from having been asked to commence liaison duties with the government and the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA) on behalf of EO, Roelf had been tasked to assess the overall military situation. Andy's task was to support Roelf in preparing for the arrival of our men and conduct an intelligence appreciation to enable an understanding of the RUF's operational deployments, activities, and modus operandi.

Andy Brown, EO's first intelligence officer in Sierra Leone

Roelf and Andy were exceptionally well received on their arrival in Freetown. Numerous issues were discussed, albeit in an informal manner, including uniforms, the rank structures of the EO force due to arrive, weapons, equipment, ammunition, and medical support. It was also decided that EO would, as contractors to the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA), wear their uniforms and follow their rank structures. Integrating EO into the SLA in this manner would serve all parties well and our men would be viewed as part of the SLA.

Roelf's first official sit-down meeting with Brigadier Maada Bio was held on 29 April 1995. This meeting set the tone for a very good working relationship between Maada Bio and the EO men. The discussions focused primarily on the arrival and deployment of the EO force soon to arrive, their tasks, and the role they would play in support of the SLA. Insofar as medical support was concerned, the poor state of the medical facilities in Sierra Leone resulted in a decision that EO casualties would be evacuated to Dakar in Senegal until such time as EO could establish its own state- of-the art medical facilities to stabilise sick and wounded EO men prior to medical evacuation to South Africa.

Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, President Strasser's right-hand man (photo: Newstime Africa)

An office within the RSLMF headquarters at Cockerill Barracks in Freetown was allocated and furnished for EO's exclusive use.

Lafras and Duncan Rykaard kept me abreast of the progress they were making as they quietly assembled the men for the advance party. Duncan had been redeployed from Saurimo to await his redeployment to Sierra Leone.

Any whiff of what we were about to embark on would give the media, MI, DFA, and the 'advisors' of the commercial entities involved in purchasing and marketing rebel diamonds an opportunity to warn the RUF of our pending arrival so our plans and movements were kept as secret as possible. I was also kept abreast of Roelf and Andy's activities in Sierra Leone and unsurprisingly, all was well there too.

On 5 May 1995, the 50-man advance party flew out of Lanseria Airport for Freetown on an Ibis Air Boeing 727.

On-board, the men were mostly quiet and expectant as most had no idea what their destination was. The excitement was, however, palpable. Some speculated that it might be the oil-rich Angolan enclave of Cabinda. Others thought it might be Burkina Faso or Gabon, but many didn't even bother to speculate. They all knew that wherever it was, there would be a conflict or a war that needed to be stopped. Only the leader group knew they were bound for Sierra Leone—and they weren't discussing their destination.

The advance party would be supported by our offices in Pretoria, which would be their rear link HQ. Our signallers had already provided the advance party with their radio frequency nets, call-signs, and radio schedules. With Roelf and Andy in theatre, there was already daily radio contact between Sierra Leone and Pretoria and this had allowed for frequencies to be predicted, adjusted, and confirmed.

It was only after the Boeing had refuelled in Luanda and was out of Angolan airspace that Lafras announced their destination and mission over the intercom. The men listened in excited silence as Lafras told them they would be responsible for training the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and preparing them to do battle with the RUF. There was a growing sense of expectation in the Boeing as he explained what they could expect on the ground

in Sierra Leone, what the RUF looked like in the field, and their tactics, techniques, and procedures. A few hours later they touched down at Lungi International Airport, Freetown.

The men were ferried across the bay from Lungi International to Freetown by helicopters operated by Soros Air (a local aviation company) and allocated billets at the Cockerill Military Base where they would spend a few days before starting work. Their accommodation comprised a series of old, filthy, and dilapidated garages close to the main SLA HQ.

Duncan and the pilots were allocated a small house in Freetown itself. Living conditions were very basic. One of the men later told me:

We were somewhat taken aback by our new home. The place was dirty, run down, and showed that the entire SLA lacked even basic hygiene discipline. There might have been a war going on but that was no excuse. It was all a little stone age for us. We immediately set about cleaning up the place. We certainly didn't want to end up being casevaced with dysentery or something. But considering their personal discipline, it was no wonder their combat discipline had failed them time and again.

Roelf briefed Duncan on known, suspected and predicted RUF locations, targets, and actions, and the prevailing operational situation. Duncan, in turn, assumed command of the EO force and Roelf's liaison duties, and immediately started developing a campaign strategy to drive the RUF away from Freetown and then annihilate the movement. Bert would take command of the EO deployment as soon as he had finalised his resignation from the SANDF and arrived in the country.

The men were soon issued with personal weapons, ammunition, and vehicles. Renier Hugo, the commander of what would become our mobile force, found himself with two old Land Rovers (one that had seen use with GSG's Gurkha forces which had by then already left Sierra Leone after having been stunned by the RUF) two neglected BMP-2s, and two dilapidated Bedford[296] trucks.[297] The condition of their weapons and the state of the vehicles left much to be desired. The men immediately set about rectifying the situation. Vehicles and weapons were cleaned and serviced. Sights were zeroed, ammunition distributed, uniforms and equipment issued, and they were soon ready to join the fight against the RUF and halt their terror campaign.

SLA officers and men watched in amazement as our men ripped off the Land- Rover's doors, removed the windshields and mounted DShK (12.7mm) machine guns on the floors. Despite the SLA's apparent inability to maintain weapons and equipment, they had never before seen anyone purposely do such 'damage' to vehicles.

Machine guns were also mounted onto the Bedfords and Sandbags were placed on the floors to provide some landmine protection. As a mobile force, the men wanted to ensure as large a degree of mobility as possible, and sufficient firepower to counter any RUF attack. If their vehicles let them down, their weapons surely wouldn't.

The signallers, under Andy's instructions and Iwan's watchful gaze, immediately established their radio intercept system which gave them instantaneous access to the

Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) radio traffic. The EO contingent could now access rebel radio communications that enabled them to plot their locations and movements, and monitor their plans and intentions with ease.

The following day, Carl Alberts and Arthur Walker began their conversion- training from the Mi-17 to the Mi-24 attack helicopter. This was something they had been looking forward to since their time in Angola. Arthur later told me he couldn't wait to test it in battle. In his words: "It was a beast of a machine."

That same day, Renier Hugo, after being briefed of the planned campaign strategy, received his first orders from Duncan. He was to take the Mobile Force to Yonibana, a small rural town in Tonkolili District in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. Yonibana, the seat of the Yoni Chiefdom was also known as Camp Charlie but more commonly as Mile 91 (its approximate distance to the north-east of the capital, Freetown). Mile 91 was located deep inside RUF-dominated territory.

Reiner immediately began developing plans for movement to the area. As the RUF had established themselves around Freetown, the movement would take the form of an advance-to-contact, allowing immediate action if they were ambushed en route. The under-armed Mobile Force would be travelling through the Malal Hills

(also sometimes referred to as Malakal Hills) area where Major Bob Mackenzie and his GSG Gurkhas had been ambushed and routed by the RUF earlier in the year.

Accompanying them would be the commander of the Mile 91 infantry contingent, Major Samura, and a few SLA drivers and guides—about ten SLA men in total.

Once there, they would secure the area and prepare themselves for their upcoming task: training the two SLA infantry companies based there.

Prior to their departure, Andy briefed Renier and his men on the current intelligence situation. Having been in Freetown for only a few days, Andy had been forced to rely solely on the SLA's intelligence on the RUF. Unfortunately, they had none or if they did, they weren't yet ready to share it with EO. Radio intercepts had, however, indicated that the RUF were very active in the area the Mobile Force was to pass through.

Duncan instructed Renier's force not to conduct any offensive operations against the RUF under any circumstances. They could retaliate if ambushed, but nothing else.

Renier later told me:

Andy's intelligence briefing was really shit. He had no current intelligence and what had been passed on to him was a jumble of uncoordinated information, apparently consisting of rumours generated by the SLA. They had no idea how to gather intelligence and were quick to point out to Andy that the RUF was really incapable of putting up much resistance. Before we left for Mile 91 Andy assured us it would be a walk in the park. All he could really tell us was that we would be in rebel-held territory as soon as we had passed the final SLA checkpoint on our way out of Freetown. This, in essence, was his first intelligence briefing to us.

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A few days after their arrival in Freetown, Renier's Mobile Force was ready to move out to its objective, not fully realising what lay ahead of them.

As befits any true force commander, Renier—leading from the front—travelled in the lead vehicle. The men knew they would be moving through hostile territory so they had no intention of being caught off guard. They were well prepared to retaliate if the RUF tried to ambush or attack them.

By now, the rumour that EO had arrived in Sierra Leone had spread like wildfire. As the six-vehicle EO convoy slowly ambled through the narrow streets of Freetown on its way to Mile 91, people left their houses, lined the streets, and cheered "Viva South Africa! Viva Mandela! Viva Executive Outcomes!" When I later heard about the send-off the men had been given, I noted that it contrasted starkly with what the media had written about our reception by the locals. But then again—as in Angola— the South African media obviously thought they knew a lot more about the situation than the locals did.

Lafras accompanied the Mobile Force to the last SLA checkpoint where he bade them farewell and then returned to the SLA HQ to report to the president—Captain Strasser—that our men were on their way to Mile 91.

As the Mobile Force cautiously passed the last checkpoint out of Freetown with weapons ready, it became apparent that Andy's comment about a 'walk in the park' had been somewhat misleading. The RUF had sprung a large ambush on the outskirts of Freetown some days before. Hundreds of cartridge cases lay scattered on the verges of the road along with the burnt-out hulks of vehicles and the charred bodies of several civilians that no one had cared to remove or bury. These bodies would be left to nature—and marauding animals to take care of. According to Renier, the stench of death was overwhelming as they passed the rotting bodies.

En route to Mile 91 the men scanned the deep jungle, trying to locate possible RUF ambush or firing positions. Potential ambush positions had been identified from maps and the men dismounted and cleared these on foot before the convoy continued. Renier took no chances and defile drills were continually applied along the road.

The move from Freetown to Mile 91 was uneventful.

As the force neared its final destination, Cobus Claassens, an ex-1 Parachute Battalion officer who had only recently joined the company (and was acting as Renier's second-in-command) called Renier on the radio.

"Take a look at the rear of the convoy. You won't believe what's following us." Everyone who looked was surprised.

Following the last vehicle in the convoy was a second convoy comprising more than 100 civilian vehicles. In the hope of getting to Mile 91 safely, locals along the route had jumped into their cars and followed the EO convoy for protection. Renier immediately ordered his vehicles to close up to prevent civilian vehicles from getting in between the Mobile Force's vehicles and isolating them. Such a move by the civilian vehicles would make every vehicle under Renier's command vulnerable and easy to isolate and attack with fire.

On their arrival at Mile 91, Renier was somewhat taken aback when a newly recruited EO man—until recently still a serving SANDF soldier—thanked him for getting them

safely through rebel-held territory. He claimed such leadership was lacking in the new SANDF that he had just resigned from, and that morale was at a very low point there. Renier was shocked by his comment. I was equally surprised when Renier told me about it.

A tactical HQ was immediately established and the communications link between Mile 91 and Freetown confirmed. Renier notified Duncan that they had reached their objective and were establishing themselves in preparation to defend the area and start training the SLA troops. The message was immediately relayed to Pretoria. Within minutes of Renier's first message, I was aware of what was happening.

As was EO's standard practice when operating in hostile territory, the men prepared defensive positions, established a secure perimeter, set out their fields of fire, placed support weapons in position, sent out small security patrols, and set about registering the mortar defensive fire (DF) and DF 'save our souls' (SOS) tasks. The latter allowed own fire to be called down if there was a danger of being overrun by the enemy. If the RUF decided to attack the base they would get a surprise they hadn't bargained for.

As soon as word leaked out that the 'EO task force' had inserted itself at Mile 91, jubilation broke out throughout Freetown. The Sierra Leoneans viewed this as a 'defeat of the RUF', despite not a single shot having been fired. However, once word got to South Africa that we were in Sierra Leone, things would be viewed very differently.

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At Lungi, Arthur and Carl were undergoing their conversion training. Carl Dietz, redeployed from Angola, soon joined Duncan's HQ in Freetown and was monitoring the Mi-24 conversion training which was being conducted by a Russian pilot by the name of Victor.

As Arthur would later tell me:

It was quite strange really. Once again we had an instructor who spoke no English and of course we spoke no Russian. Victor would explain things by drawing in the sand, making noises, and using his hands to illustrate his sand-pictures.

Our curricula vitae also had to be sent to Moscow rather urgently as the Russians had to give permission for us to fly the machine.

Carl and I were keen to learn how to fly this monster and were soon able to figure out exactly what Victor was telling us.

Three days into our training, Carl radioed us to find out if we were ready to fly our first combat mission in the Mi-24. Although we were still in jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers— we hadn't yet been issued with uniforms—we answered in the affirmative.

Within minutes, we were airborne and on our way to an RUF supply point that the signallers had picked up on the radio. It was at a bridge over a river some ten minutes' flight out of Freetown.

When we approached the area, we spotted the bridge but saw no sign of the RUF. We brought the chopper down to tree-top level and scanned the undergrowth. We eventually

spotted what appeared to be a whole lot of white bags hidden deep in the jungle.

I checked this with Andy in Freetown and he confirmed that the RUF radios were talking about a gunship hovering above them. He suggested that we fire some rockets into the white bags. We did and almost immediately Dietz told us that the RUF were reporting that they were under fire from the Mi-24 and taking casualties. He suggested we off load some more ordnance onto their position. Carl and I couldn't see a thing and the jungle canopy was very thick but we off loaded all of the rockets into that specific area. Dietz was now telling us that the RUF were yelling about being under serious fire on their radios and advised us to continue doing what we were doing as we were obviously smack on target.

When our rockets were spent, we opened up with the Gatling gun.

With our ammo almost all gone, we left the area and headed back to Lungi. On arrival, we were immediately flown across to the main HQ and ushered into Brigadier Maada Bio's office where we were congratulated on our mission. Apparently, we had killed more than sixteen RUF members and wounded many more. The brigadier was rather excited about this; to date the Russians hadn't achieved anything with the Mi-24.

This was, to the best of our knowledge, the first time a helicopter crew other than Russians had flown the Mi-24 in combat. Needless to say, Carl and I were rather pleased with ourselves.

The view from the cockpit of the Mi-24 en route to strike RUF targets (photo: Jim Hooper)

Not wanting to risk a repeat of the Angolan situation, we had purposely not breathed a word about our men having been deployed in Sierra Leone. Any leaked comments about our intentions would be a clear warning to the RUF, and they would target our men.

We were well aware that news of our arrival was spreading like wildfire within Freetown and surrounds, and that we would probably be rapidly and rabidly condemned when word got beyond Sierra Leone's borders. Unlike in Angola, our primary mission in Sierra Leone was to do battle with the RUF and relieve pressure on the government and the civilian population. Only once that had been achieved would our men be able to commence the reorganisation and retraining of the SLA.

Eventually and inevitably, news of an EO contingent having left Freetown for an unknown destination filtered out of West Africa.

I was beyond caring about the media's thoughts regarding Sierra Leone; they were still attacking us for being in Angola on a daily basis. We knew that Foreign Affairs and MI would be quick to jump on the bandwagon and decided to wait and see what they would get up to. We didn't have to wait long.

True to form, the DFA issued a press release condemning EO for its 'destabilising actions' in Africa. From their comments it seemed they regarded the RUF as a stabilising force in Sierra Leone—perhaps because the RUF's diamonds were being sent to certain South African buyers.

The media had already made up their minds to support the disinformation spouted by MI and the DFA, and despite being frustrated, I was unable to do anything about it. It was like watching Angola happen all over again. They intentionally and deliberately warned the rebels that they were about to be driven from their safe havens, and placed the lives of our men at risk in the process.

I passed the order through Nic van den Bergh (by then manning a desk at our new offices in Raslow to the east of Pretoria) that if the RUF fired even a single shot at our men, they were to retaliate with 100 rounds. Nic told me I was a little late; he had already told Bert and Duncan to do just that.

Pratap Chatterjee, later writing for Covert Action Quarterly, inaccurately reported the arrival of EO in Sierra Leone as follows:

> The Executive Outcomes' mercenaries arrived in Sierra Leone better equipped than most armies in Africa, with Russian helicopter gunships, a radio intercept system, two Boeing 727s to transport troops and supplies, an Andover casualty evacuation aircraft, and fuel-air explosives. Used with devastating results by the US in the Gulf War, fuel-air explosives—one step below nuclear weapons in power—suck out all available oxygen upon detonation, killing all life within a one mile radius.

Another rebel supporter and propagandist for destabilising forces in Africa had just been identified.

Many of the journalists who had already written about, or would subsequently write about the company, never acknowledged the fact that EO didn't possess its own armour, artillery, combat aircraft, or weapons. We used whatever the host government could provide us with. The false claim about the company being 'better equipped than most armies in Africa' was simply intended to create the impression that EO was uncontrollable and able to launch distant offensives against any government we chose to depose. These wildly false claims were laughable, but at that time, we did not regard this disinformation as funny.

With equipment such as this dilapidated Land Rover, the media 'specialists' falsely claimed EO was 'better equipped than most armies in Africa' (photo: unknown)

Others reported our appearance in Sierra Leone as follows:

March 1995: Strasser then invited in the South African private security force, Executive Outcomes. By then RUF rebels were less than twenty miles from the capital, although their hold on the rest of the country outside of the main diamond mining areas was intermittent. The RUF was asset-stripping most of the mining operations in the country: diamonds, rutile, and bauxite. This hit the government's revenue base. Executive Outcomes initiated training programmes for the army. Executive Outcomes was run by Eeben Barlow, formerly of the 32nd Battalion of the South African Special Forces,[298] which was active in South Africa's destabilisation policy against its neighbours in the 1980s. Many key figures in EO are also from the 32nd Battalion and had served in covert operations in Angola and Mozambique.

Soon after it established its positions, the EO Mobile Force set about training the SLA troops at Mile 91.

The training programme, developed by Renier and his men, included subjects such as basic training, musketry and marksmanship, field craft, radio procedures, jungle warfare, patrol formations, and tactics.

While the training was in progress, the local villagers warned our men that an RUF force was approaching Mile 91 and were planning to attack their village as well as the EO base.

Renier—contrary to Duncan's orders, but not being prepared to sit back and allow the slaughter of more innocent civilians in his area of responsibility—despatched an aggressive fighting patrol to intercept and destroy the enemy force.

The RUF force soon realised the danger they were facing and immediately withdrew.

The local chief, keen to show his appreciation, presented our men with a pregnant goat and two pineapples. This kind of pathetic scene played out repeatedly as villagers who had almost nothing gave what they had to show their appreciation to the men who were willing to protect them and afford them a semblance of security.

The training at Mile 91 was well into its third week when news came that the RUF had commenced their advance on Freetown. Panic set in among locals and foreigners alike: everyone feared the very worst.

The belief that the collapse of the capital and the country was inevitable spread rapidly. People once more began to live in fear of the pending mass RUF attack on Freetown. Others packed their meagre belongings and fled.

The RUF were about to realise that a different type of force was now standing in their way of mayhem, murder, and terror.

Members of EO's Mobile Force, Sierra Leone (Photo J Hooper)

27:
The Relief of Freetown

Fear was at an all-time high as the rebels' new offensive brought them to within a few kilometres of Freetown. Their reputation for murder, torture, dismemberment, and other heinous crimes had a paralytic effect on the nation. The Sierra Leone Army ran around in proverbial circles, panic stricken, and not knowing what to do. It became obvious that their fear of the RUF resulted in a lack of courage to fight—they also lacked discipline, training, equipment, and decisive leadership.

Businesses closed down and people began to evacuate in anticipation of the city being overrun by the RUF. Foreign embassies warned their citizens to leave the country and began implementing emergency evacuation plans. Meanwhile, the impending horror was largely ignored by the media.

Reports and rumours involving murder, mutilation, rape, and worse from outlying areas filtered through to Duncan and his intelligence officers. The SLA had proved itself as ineffectual as the Momoh-led government in stopping the atrocities and halting the RUF in its tracks. As the RUF approached Freetown there were rumours of soldiers deserting and joining the ranks of the rebels. The ECOMOG forces were equally impotent and unsure of what to expect or do.

The media and South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs were extremely concerned about EO putting a stop to the RUF's horrors. Women routinely had their hands hacked off (photo: unknown)

Duncan was determined that Freetown would not collapse under an RUF assault. He began to make immediate plans to withdraw Renier's command back to Freetown to secure the city and then stage an aggressive counter-offensive that would drive the RUF as far back as possible.

At Mile 91, Renier had succumbed to a serious bout of malaria and was weak and unable to command the operation. He was hastily casevaced by helicopter to Freetown and then flown by an Ibis Air Andover aircraft to the Louis Pasteur clinic in Dakar, Senegal for treatment.

Roelf van Heerden was despatched to Mile 91 to take his place.

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To bolster our meagre air support and provide our men with resupply and casevac capabilities, we bought two second-hand Mi-17 helicopters in Mozambique. These were flown to Lanseria Airport to be serviced and repainted in a new livery. It was also decided that crating and shipping them would take too long so they were fitted with long-range fuel tanks so that Mark Von Zorgenvrei (known as 'Zorgs'), Juba Joubert, and Willie Venter could fly them to Sierra Leone.

While our pilots were waiting for their new flight orders, the helicopters were targeted by the DCI's Counter Intelligence Operations (CI Ops) as a threat to South Africa's national security. It had been concluded that the two helicopters must represent something sinister—more so because they had been manufactured in the old Soviet Union.

This apparently confirmed suspicions that EO was a communist organisation, and MI allegations about me having been a member of the Soviet intelligence apparatus resurfaced. It didn't matter that Soviet manufactured equipment littered Africa or that the UN itself was also flying Mi-8s and 17s all over Africa and elsewhere. They didn't have long to speculate about our mysterious helicopters though, because they shortly afterwards took off for Freetown. MI would, in a later 'intelligence report', claim that we had stolen the helicopters.

The long and exhausting flight was uneventful until they landed for a refuelling stop at the Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos, Nigeria. The Nigerian government and the country's media had a field day, having been told by South Africa that EO helicopters were en route to Sierra Leone to support the RUF. The pilots were treated like animals while being briefly detained. Apparently, and according to the Nigerians, South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs and Military Intelligence had asked them to arrest our pilots and impound the helicopters because they were considered a threat to stability in Africa. They were also told that EO had 'stolen' the helicopters. With the Mi-17s grounded in Lagos, our men on the ground in Sierra Leone had no air support for their pending mission. Without troop carrying helicopters to deploy air assault forces and conduct casevac and air supply, our campaign strategy would rapidly grind to a snail's pace.

Ironically, the same pilots and their helicopters would later be called on to provide logistical and other support to beleaguered Nigerian troops in Sierra Leone.

Juba described the situation:

Those bastards had most certainly been warned that we were coming and asked to stop us. We were exhausted having flown halfway across Africa and we weren't in the mood for their shit. The Mi-17s were impounded and we were forced to stay under the rotors and bellies while Nigerian troops with automatic weapons guarded us. We had to beg for water which they eventually only gave us grudgingly. The situation eventually became very hostile with the Nigerians openly threatening us. Their only interest was in keeping us on the ground for as long as possible…or until we paid a bribe. It was obvious they

didn't want us to get to Sierra Leone. It was unpleasant but we'd been through far worse in our lives.

No bribes were paid and to everyone's relief the pilots and their helicopters were eventually allowed to depart for Freetown. Our relationship with the Nigerians later improved considerably.

Now, with the support of our two Mi-17s added to the single Mi-24 helicopter gunship, the men were keen to put an end to the RUF's murderous activities.

The Mi-24 had initially been piloted by a group of Ukrainians who were not at all happy when our pilots butted in and began flying missions in a helicopter they thought of as their own. The formidable machine was soon providing close-air support to the government forces and our own men, as well as flying independent ground-attack missions.

Developed on the Mi-8/17s propulsion system's platform, the Mi-24 had proved its worth in several combat theatres around the world. Armed with a 12.7mm four- barrelled Gatling gun that could shoot up to 4 500 rounds per minute,[299] the gunship also had armoured plating which gave the pilot sufficient protection to be able to fly it into enemy ground fire.

As Juba put it:

It was like flying a tank. Small-arms fire made no impression on us when we flew that monster. No matter what the RUF threw at us, we could retaliate. The difference was that we could retaliate in a way they had never dreamed of. The Ukrainian crews that flew it before we arrived apparently didn't make much of an impression on the RUF. We could give our guys close-air support when they needed it, and also fly our own missions to take out RUF concentrations.

That Gatling could flatten large tracts of jungle if the RUF chose to hide there. If only we'd had some of these gunships in Angola, the war would probably have been ended earlier. In Sierra Leone, though, at least we had one and we used it effectively.

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With the RUF's offensive against Freetown gathering momentum, a joint planning session was held with the senior SLA officer cadre. During this session, the immediate operational priorities were reconfirmed and developed into a broad operational design which, due to a lack of intelligence, would be adapted on the ground as the situation dictated.

It was phased as follows:

Phase 1: Relieve the pressure on Freetown and drive the RUF back into the jungle as far away from the capital as possible. This phase would commence with assaults on enemy bases located within the Waterloo District.

Phase 2: Occupy key areas to deprive the RUF of financial resources. This would allow the government to recommence its own financial programmes.

Phase 3: Locate, confirm and destroy the RUF's operational, training, and logistical bases and supply routes, and pinpoint and annihilate their main HQ.

During the execution of the phases, the men were to give the locals trapped in RUF areas as much assistance and support as they could.

The broad operational plan was hurriedly approved by President (Captain) Strasser and his senior officers.

As soon as Roelf had assumed command of the Mobile Force, it left Mile 91 and began its advance on Freetown. Some of the men were flown from Mile 91 by Mi-17. Phase 1 of the operation was under way.

To the east of Freetown, Roelf's force, comprising both EO and hastily trained SLA members, encountered a large RUF force poised to launch an attack on the city. The rebels were immediately and relentlessly attacked and driven back into the jungle. During one of the numerous firefights, Roelf was wounded in the leg by shrapnel, but he continued to command his men until he could be casevaced.

Having opened the route back into Freetown, the Mobile Force was moved to the Benguema Training Camp (BTC), an SLA training area approximately twenty kilometres from Freetown and south of the Bunce River. Duncan established his operational and command base there. The RUF, despite having been driven back into the jungle, were not yet prepared to give up and go home. They were still massing for what they believed would be their final assault on Freetown and BTC became the staging area from which they would be driven back.

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Bert Sachse, now with the rank of brigadier in the SLA, arrived in Freetown and assumed command from Duncan. Under his leadership, an invigorated EO soon proved that it meant business and was not intimidated or prepared to allow the RUF to continue with its murderous campaign.

Intelligence gathered from locals and prisoners revealed that the RUF were operating from a nearby base known as Moyamba[300] to the south east of Freetown, and that it was from there they intended to launch their final assault. A small EO reconnaissance team inserted into the area to confirm and monitor the RUF build up quickly confirmed the intelligence.

Adhering to the maxim that attack is the best form of defence, Bert and his planners devised an operational plan to mount an assault on the RUF base, relieve the pressure on Freetown, and force the rebels to retreat into the jungle. Once the pressure had been relived, the campaign strategy could be implemented.

A helicopter-borne assault force (fire force) commanded by Roelf van Heerden with Simon Witherspoon and Rich Nichol as assault team commanders was hastily assembled. For the duration of the pending operation the Mobile Force was placed under Jos Grobler's command.

An Mi-24 accompanying a heliborne assault force (photo: unknown)

The basic plan was simple: Jos' Mobile Force would deploy their two BMP-2s and a few Land Rovers from the Benguema Training Camp and advance directly on the RUF base at Moyamba. Their mission was to locate rebel base forward positions and entice them to open fire at maximum range while making the RUF believe that they were about to face a single, small, and obviously vulnerable force. When that happened, the fire force teams would conduct a heliborne assault on the base while the Mobile Force provided direct and indirect fire support to the helicopter borne assault teams.

En route to the target, the Mobile Force encountered a large RUF listening post and contact was immediately initiated by the rebels. Jos, keeping their heads down with his BMPs, called for the fire force to be deployed early. Following the principle that a plan is merely a basis for change, the entire operational plan was adjusted to suit what was happening on the ground. One group of the fire force was hurriedly inserted into the contact zone and gave additional fire support to Jos' Mobile Force. The other, under command of Simon Witherspoon, was diverted elsewhere for a different mission.

As Duncan later recalled:

We were now about 80 men in total, including some RSLMF troops. Opposing us—we had been briefed earlier—were probably several hundred of the enemy, although others had heard that the majority weren't in camp. We really didn't know because—through no fault of Carl (Dietz) and Andy Brown's—our intelligence was abysmal. The terrain didn't help either. The jungle was so thick that in most places you couldn't see the next man in the line even if he was only a few metres away.

Following plans that had been formulated earlier, Jos, our platoon commanders, and myself went to work observing the broader precepts of our operational plan. In essence, that meant spreading most of our troops out among the fighting vehicles and using the rest to move ahead as assault, stopper, or interference groups.

Due to the density of the jungle, which at times totally covered the road, the advance was forced to slow down to a snail's pace, which made it an easy target. By then the

advance on the RUF base was severely compromised. Duncan knew that the RUF would know the exact size of the force closing in on them but that was something the plan made provision for. At last light, our men stopped close to a village and harboured their vehicles for the night.

At dawn, the attack force was on the move again. Unbeknown to the men, the RUF had used the cover of darkness to prepare a large ambush close to where they had overnighted and, as the lead elements entered the killing ground, the rebels opened fire.

The RUF, believing they were facing a normal SLA force, had grossly erred in their assumptions and were soon taught a bitter and devastating lesson in warfare.

Our men immediately went on the offensive, manoeuvring and pouring sustained fire into the RUF positions.

Behind them, the BMPs swung into position to face the incoming RUF fire, ready to drive into the ambush and provide fire support to the men on foot. At that crucial moment, however, both BMPs threw their tracks, rendering them unable to move.

As the men fought their way towards the RUF's ambush position, one of the platoons broke into two groups to attempt a cut-off action behind the rebel ambush.

Meanwhile, Jos set up a defensive perimeter to protect the two immobilised BMPs. His position was soon assaulted by a group of a few hundred rebels.

Hearing the huge volume of gunfire to their rear, the men quickly doubled back to help Jos. Unable to talk to him due to a communications break-down, they scrambled through the dense jungle to attack and cut the rebels off from the rear.

One of the men later recounted the situation to me:

We were on the far side with the rebels between us and Jos, who was letting go at them with everything he had. One immediate result was that a lot of his outgoing fire was coming straight at us; quite a few times the guys had to go down hard because Jos' shells would overshoot the rebels and land among us: we were fucking lucky nobody was hit.

All our comms were down so Jos didn't know we were out there and we couldn't tell him.

Eventually we were able to move into a position where we could dimly make out some of the rebels ahead of us in the foliage. They were only yards away. Using my hands to signal, I quickly formed up an assault line and we hit them from behind. The moment Jos' people heard us, they held back their fire and let us finish the job.

The RUF were quickly overwhelmed with aggression and fire and the survivors fled in a desperate attempt to escape the retaliatory fire that was being thrown at them. Their attack on Jos' force had quickly withered and now many of them lay dead and dying in the dense jungle. Some had thrown their weapons away as they ran. Others had run themselves out of their boots and sandals.

Duncan quickly consolidated the force around the area of Jos' crippled BMPs, and helicopters were called in to casevac the wounded and bring in support teams who hastily repaired and re-tracked the BMPs. Most of the casualties suffered had been caused by RUF RPG-7 shrapnel and they were quickly taken care of by our medics.

Minutes later, the outcome of this brief and bitter action was relayed to me from our Raslow offices.

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Elsewhere in the jungle and not far from where Jos' battle was raging, the lone Mi- 24 was flying in support of Simon Witherspoon's fire force group that was targeting a different but very large RUF group. Once on the ground, the force divided itself into two assault teams. The rebels they encountered were high on hallucinogenic drugs and alcohol, and had probably been told they were invisible.[301] They were taken by complete surprise. Not knowing they were about to die, they tried to put up some semblance of a defence. The Mi-24 initially drew a lot of ground fire but continued to deliver much needed close air support to our men despite it having been hit several times.

Simon Witherspoon getting ready for deployment while an exhausted Juba sleeps after an Mi-24 mission (photo: unknown)

One of the men who partook in this assault later recounted, "We saw the rebel fire streaking upwards to the Mi-24. I actually saw some rounds hit it but that didn't stop its attack. It pounded their positions relentlessly and the gunfire hitting it made no impact on the pilots. I was really pleased that it was flying for us and not against us."

Heavily outnumbered as they were, the men effectively used the gunship as a force-multiplier and kept calling in targets to it. Despite the large amount of fire coming their way, they continued their aggressive attack. Rebels were being killed by the dozens but the alcohol and drugs made that irrelevant to them. Many fought to the death, still believing they were invisible.

By midday the tide began to turn in our favour. Elements of the one assault team had by now been cut off from their main group and were surrounded by a very large group of rebels. Already low on ammunition, they realised that a hot extraction was impossible as the Mi-17 would probably be shot down by heavy incoming fire. Their only option lay in calling Mi-24 fire down on to their own position and then staging a break-out fight.

As one of the participants later told me:

It was incredibly difficult to keep formation in the dense jungle. Some of the firefights happened at very close range—possibly two to three metres. Somehow we got cut off from the main group and we were soon virtually trapped in a small defile. The RUF obviously thought they would be able to wipe us out, and knowing the area better than we did, they soon surrounded us. Wherever we probed, we met resistance. It wasn't that accurate but it was still bloody dangerous. We realised it would be impossible to call in the choppers to lift us out so Simon [Witherspoon] called in an Mi-24 strike on our position. Simon talked Carl [Alberts] and Arthur [Walker] onto the target area, told them where we were holed up, and the gunship blasted the RUF out of their socks with the Gatling. The RUF who survived that strike soon left us alone.

Simon would later tell me:

Although we had loaded ourselves with ammunition, we were running low as the fighting was intense. We could hear the rebels moving through the undergrowth and it was a matter of time before they got to us. I could just imagine what they would do to us if they captured us. So, I took what I considered to be the best option: I called in the gunship. If Carl and Arthur missed the rebels and hit us, at least, we would have died quickly.

Luckily, they were on target…

Later that day, our men captured the Moyamba base. EO had suffered one man wounded and the SLA three wounded. Our only casualty, Henry Pan, had lost an eye and he was hastily evacuated out of Sierra Leone.

Those doing a final sweep through the base found more than 30 bodies and many blood trails leading into the jungle.

The size of the RUF base was remarkable—large enough to house several hundred men.

Damien Lewis recounted the aftermath of the battle in his book, Operation Certain Death:

The RUF retreated to their base in the Malal Hills where, barely six weeks earlier, Captain Bob [sic] Mackenzie and his men had been ambushed and eaten. The operation was hailed as a major victory, halting the RUF advance on Freetown in its tracks... the news of the victory was broadcast on Sierra Leonean radio, the inhabitants of Freetown went wild. At local street parties, EO's troops were mobbed like returning heroes.

Lafras told me very shortly afterwards that the rebels had been caught off-guard as they had expected a normal SLA attack—a lot of noise and no real effort to defeat them. It apparently never occurred to them that they could be seen by our men.

It had been a new experience for them to have someone assaulting their ambush positions and attacking their bases with that amount of aggression and fire. The noise of the fierce gun battles had been heard through the dense jungle for miles around and another rebel group had incorrectly assumed that their forces were winning the battles.

When they came to investigate, they too ran into relentless fire from the attacking EO forces.

In a very short space of time, our men had outmanoeuvred, overwhelmed, and driven back the rebel advance that had been threatening Freetown. With the RUF now on the defensive, tension around Freetown began to ease. Foreign diplomats, businessmen, and residents started to return. They couldn't thank us enough. Indeed, I received several calls from diplomats and government officials in Freetown wanting to express their gratitude for EO's rapid intervention and the professional manner in which our men were working and conducting themselves.

EO mobile patrols often encountered RUF ambushes while driving through the jungles (photo: unknown)

The men were welcomed by villagers wherever they travelled and it was not unusual for them to be mobbed by people who saw them as saviours. Many of the locals offered the men what little food they had as a gesture of thanks. The only antagonism within Sierra Leone came from the RUF and the UN—beyond Sierra Leone, it came from the DFA, MI, and the media. Over time, the international chorus would also make itself heard.

As usual, the media and its 'undisclosed sources' distorted the facts. A number of journalists tried to come across as though they had the moral high ground by refusing to acknowledge the true horrors of the RUF's terror campaign. In fact they went out of their way to condemn us and turn a blind eye to RUF excesses. According to them, the rebels were true freedom fighters which made their atrocities acceptable on the premise that the end justifies the means.

Illustrating the horrors typical to the RUF, the New York Times ran an article titled, 'Sierra Leone is no place to be young',[302] which detailed the experiences of three youngsters forcibly recruited into the RUF:

Virtually unnoticed in the catalogue of horrors emanating from Sierra Leone's brutal civil war is the forcible conscription of children, some as young as seven years old…they are forced to become soldiers, human shields, spies, porters and sex slaves…

…

M.G. was ten years old when he was first forced to point his Kalashnikov at a human being and pull the trigger. He was a fourth grader walking to school when he was abducted by the Revolutionary United Front, one of two allied rebel groups sowing terror in Sierra Leone.

''The rebel camp was not far from my home,'' the boy, now thirteen, says. ''The commander brought ten people from my village, men, women and children. He assembled everyone and told the prisoners they were going to die. They called to me by name, crying, 'M., talk for us.' I knew them all. The children were my friends. I pleaded with the commander. He told me: 'Kill them. If you don't, I will kill you.' He put his gun to my head. My body began to shake. I fired, and kept firing. I watched them fall. Their limbs were twitching. It took them a long time to die—about three minutes. Then I vomited. It was the first time I killed.''

He no longer knows how many people he has slaughtered, how many atrocities he has committed or witnessed. ''You don't count the people you kill,'' he says. ''You just see the bodies on the ground afterward.'' He revisits them often in his frequent nightmares. ''I see them dead all around me.''

…

If the future for boy soldiers is bleak, for girls it is worse, as I learn from I. (who has only one name, which is not uncommon). She sits unmoving, her head down, as she describes the 1995 rebel attack on her village when she was 13. She has the flat manner and voice of one who is severely depressed. Just once, tears slide down her cheeks, but she appears not to notice them.

''It was late afternoon,'' she says in a monotone. ''I was washing dishes at the river with six other girls. We tried to run, but they caught us. Three girls resisted. To punish them, the rebels cut off their ears. They knifed out their eyes. Then they killed them. I was so afraid, I couldn't move. They said if we struggled, they would kill us too. They raped us. They held me down. It was the first time I had sex.'' Over the next four days, the tall, graceful girl, now 16, was gang-raped repeatedly by rebel soldiers. It was two weeks before she could walk again. Later, at the rebel base, the assaults went on. ''Each night we were tied by the ankles to the girl next to us. The rebels had sex with us in the presence of everyone. It was always different men. Every time, they hurt me. If I cried, they beat me. I prayed all the time I would not become pregnant.''

During the day, she was used as a human shield, and watched as other girls got gunned down. She was also a porter. ''They took our shoes and made us walk barefoot through the bush for as much as 40 kilometres. The loads were so heavy, I could barely lift them. If you complained, or stopped, they beat you.'' Some girls abducted by the rebel forces have become combatants, and a handful have even risen to the rank of squad commander. Mostly, however, they are employed in a perverted form of their traditional roles: as porters, cooks, looters and sex slaves. Many of them, like I., are made to be all four.

M.G and I.'s stories were by no means isolated ones. This was happening almost every day in Sierra Leone.

Several of the men later told me that they had been physically sickened by the horrors committed by the RUF.

A typical child soldier, West Africa (photo: unknown)

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Foreign Affairs' Director General Rusty Evans' attitude towards and condemnation of EO was indeed a reflection of his lack of understanding and knowledge of what was really happening in Sierra Leone. I surmised that his comments had been made to support those he needed to protect because they were purchasing the diamonds that were fuelling the war in Sierra Leone. Indeed, he and his masters were giving tacit support to the RUF in order to line their pockets.

Rusty Evans, director general of SA's Foreign Affairs, who along with MI, continuously lied in his mediastatements in efforts to smear EO and protect rebels from the company's assistance to African governments (photo: mg.co.za)

One press report was a classic piece of disinformation: Apparently—and according to 'unnamed sources'—our gunship pilots had informed me that they were struggling to identify civilians living amongst and moving with the rebels. Allegedly my response had been, 'kill them all'. Sick as it was, I couldn't do anything to disprove it. Besides, nobody seemed to be interested in what I or the company had to say. To them, the RUF were entitled to govern Sierra Leone, despite their actions and cruelty towards the local population and whoever came between them.

Strangely, some in the media also criticised us for having been recompensed for our services by the governments of Angola and Sierra Leone. They seemed to find it incomprehensible—and apparently disgusting—that we actually got paid for our work. I had yet to come across a journalist who worked purely out of the goodness of his or her heart—or, for that matter—a UN soldier who had offered his services for free.

But regardless of what the media had to say, we were at ease with our consciences.

I later tried to explain our views on and actions in Angola and Sierra Leone to a journalist. It was like talking to a freshly painted wall:

If you walk past a house that has been set alight, and you can see the arsonists fuelling the fire and hear the screams for help from inside, there are choices to be made; either help the arsonists and throw fuel on the fire while gloating at the dying occupants or rush to the aid of the occupants while driving away the arsonists. We chose the latter—and will continue to do so despite the disinformation, lies, and negativity we get from the UN, DFA, MI, their faithful servants, and the likes of you.

Military Intelligence, by now having taken note of the fact that we were in Sierra Leone, was quick to launch new operations against us spearheaded by their SDCI Ops. A flurry of new taskings was sent out to their agents and additional emergency funds were allocated to the investigation and disruption of the company and the families of the men. The agents, along with their handlers, once more sat down and devised ways to stop us by sucking intelligence out of their thumbs.

I again tried to convince the South African government that EO was not working to destabilise Angola or Sierra Leone as was being widely reported. I wrote to President Nelson Mandela and asked for a meeting to discuss the true situation. I received a reply from a South African naval captain[303] saying that the president had no interest in meeting me. Obviously, Mandela was being protected by gatekeepers who were intent on shielding him from reality and truth.

This meant I had to aim several rungs down the ladder to state our case.

I reluctantly set my sights on one of our most vocal opponents, the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting took several weeks to finalise as continual excuses were offered. After threatening to get our lawyers to write and make an appointment, I was eventually and reluctantly given an opportunity to see the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad. I asked for his Director General, Rusty Evans, to be present but unremarkably, he

didn't pitch. He no doubt knew that I would confront him about the continual lies his department propagated in front of his minister.

I met Deputy Minister Pahad in his office at the Union Buildings, the seat of government bureaucracy in Pretoria. Sitting alongside him was 'Mr Blume' from Evans' office—no doubt there to defend his master and report back on my comments to Pahad.

South Africa's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad, was remarkably ill-informed regarding conflicts and wars in Africa (photo: EWN)

Pahad was friendly and courteous, but remarkably ill-informed about EO and the conflicts and threat-drivers in Africa. He also seemed to have no real desire to consider our case seriously—or indeed even to really listen to what I had to say. He was merely going through the motions of meeting me. It seemed his mind had already been made up and he believed we were guilty of everything we had been accused of. I was bitterly disappointed at having wasted my time.

As in Angola, it was clear that the DFA, MI, and several others, including the media, were doing everything possible to ensure our rapid departure from Sierra Leone. To them, the relief of Freetown was an aggressive act by Executive Outcomes aimed at destabilising the country. And they had important ears listening to—and more importantly, believing—their lies.

The vast majority of Sierra Leoneans felt very differently.

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In May 1995 I received a call from Sabacor Limitada, a company based in Maputo, Mozambique, who told me their government wished to meet with me in order to discuss certain 'problem areas'. I decided to take Nico Palm and Nic Claassen, an ex-sapper warrant officer, along with me. Appointments were made for us to meet with members of the Mozambique Ministry of the Interior (including the minister himself and several senior officers of the police and armed forces).

We appointed Nic Claassen to start up a company that would focus on the location and clearance of landmines (de-mining), which we named Shibata Ltd. As we assumed that

the authorities in Mozambique wished to discuss de-mining with us, Shibata would offer the perfect foundation to build on.

We were scheduled to meet with the ministry, the police, and the armed forces in late May 1995.

On landing in Maputo on 25 May we were met at the airport and immediately taken to the scheduled meeting with the Minister of the Interior. Acting as our interpreter-cum-representative was Abdul Adamo of Sabacor Limitada.

During a five-hour session we were questioned in detail about how we could aid Mozambique with a host of problems, including internal security, mine clearance, and reconstruction and development. We were also asked if we would be willing to help restructure their police and armed forces and asked how we would go about such an exercise.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Minister of the Interior asked me to submit a proposal directly to his office and assured me that we would be contracted within a month of them receiving it. He was keen to get us involved in Mozambique as quickly as possible.

We flew out from Maputo that same evening, feeling rather buoyant at the prospects and already planning our strategy for Mozambique. The proposal was completed two days later and sent by courier to the Ministry of the Interior in Maputo. A copy was sent to Sabacor Limitada for information purposes.

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In early June, I was phoned by an ex-SADF officer who was on the committee of the South African Cape Corps (SACC) Association—an infantry unit comprised of coloured soldiers who had all seen active service in Namibia and Angola. The unit had been disbanded and many of its ex-soldiers had become destitute and were desperately in need of work. The officer said they were prepared to serve anywhere with EO as long as they had a guaranteed income.

Likewise, a group of ex-Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers approached me through their spokesman, Shakes Masango.

"We really need you to help us. I know we were once enemies, but we have been abandoned by the ANC. We were based at MK camps in Angola, we all speak Portuguese and are good soldiers. We need to stand together and help each other. Please think of us."

I told Shakes and the ex-SACC men to apply through our personnel officer, Thys Pelser. Several were appointed to the company.

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After Moyamba, EO seized the initiative by going on the offensive to maintain momentum and keep the RUF on the back foot.

The single helicopter gunship flew countless missions locating and destroying rebel strongholds.

Newly trained Sierra Leone troops (assisted by EO) sought out RUF bases and strongholds using ‘locate and annihilate’ tactics. The rebels were soon doing everything they could to stay out of our way.

Mi-17 en route to delivery supplies, Sierra Leone (Photo Jim Hooper)

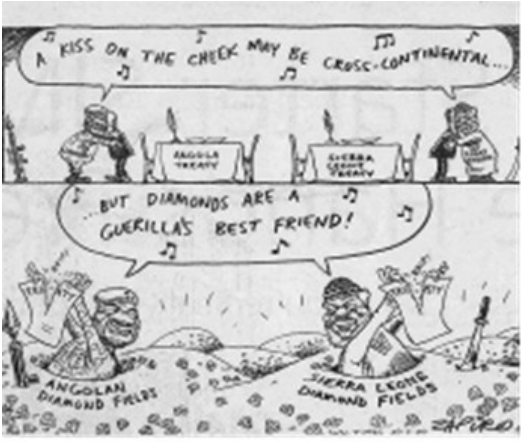
28:
Retaking the Koidu Diamond Fields

Anyone planning to fight a successful armed anti-government or terrorist campaign ought to know that one of the primary objectives (apart from causing mass enemy casualties and loss of materiel) is the denial of funds to the rebel or terrorist forces.

Without finances, rebels/terrorists cannot purchase weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, transport, fuel, clothing, or food—nor can they pay their fellow terrorists if payment is required.

Equally important is the protection of the local population and the projection of disciplined force at the correct time and at the critical point based on sound intelligence. This three-pronged attack aimed at eroding a rebel/terror group's power base is essential for ending a conflict or war.

Sierra Leone was no exception. As the rebels controlled the diamond and rutile mines—and had plenty of unregulated buyers—they had almost unlimited access to funds. It would have been folly to allow them to continue fuelling their campaign of terror through illegal use of these natural resources.


A KISS ON THE CHEEK MAY BE CROSS-CONTINENTAL...
ANGOLA TREATY
SIERRA LEONE PEACE TREATY
...BUT DIAMONDS ARE A GUERILLA'S BEST FRIEND!
ANGOLAN DIAMOND FIELDS
SIERRA LEONE DIAMOND FIELDS
ZAPIRO

A cartoon by South Africa's Zapiro accurately captures the attitude of rebel leaders towards negotiations and peace treaties
(cartoon: Zapiro)

The media, replete with its armchair strategists and tacticians, saw Executive Outcomes' work as a sinister ploy to take over the rebel cash-flow for ourselves. Unbeknown to these journalists[304] posing as 'military specialists', the reality, in conflicts like those in Angola or Sierra Leone, is that numerous factors impact on how governments

and anti-government or terrorist forces achieve their desired end results. Unfortunately, the media and its 'undisclosed sources' (DFA, MI, and their host of willing 'advisors') seemed to condone the approach followed by the RUF.

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Iwan van der Merwe and I flew out of South Africa before the operational design for the advance on Koidu[305] had been finalised. Phillip Hoy of Advanced Communications Systems Ltd., had arranged a meeting between Iwan, myself, and a communications specialist from the German Army and one of his colleagues, to discuss radio communications in hostile and problematic areas. The meeting took place in a military club in the heart of London.

The Germans were astonished to hear that we were running our communications links on HF (high frequency) radios. During the meeting, which lasted for several hours, Iwan explained to a German major (I do not recall his name) how we used HF skip, digital encryption, frequency prediction, and burst transmissions. The major furiously made notes of everything that was discussed. He also told us about the technical problems the Germans had experienced in the first Gulf War, and Iwan and I suggested possible solutions.

He eventually asked Iwan how to set up a tactical and operational radio net. Iwan was prepared for that question and gave him copies of typical tactical radio net and strategic rear-link communications feed diagrams.

"I thank you for helping the Wehrmacht,"[306] the major said with a smile after the meeting.

"No problem at all. I am pleased Iwan's knowledge was of some use to you. If you ever have any questions or problems, give us a call through Phillip. I'll get Iwan to answer them," I responded.

Iwan flew back to South Africa the following night but I stayed behind to attend a two-day conference entitled 'Equipping and Supporting Rapid Reaction Forces' hosted by Jane's[307] and the British Army. The conference was held over 13 to 14 June 1995 and its purpose was to gather ideas for the formation of the British Army's soon to be established Rapid Reaction Force.

Taking part were General Alfred Gray Jr (former Commandant of the US Marine Corps), Brigadier JJ Thomson from the British Army's Joint Rapid Deployment Force Implementation Team, and numerous other senior officers and NCOs of the British Army.

The conference covered:

- Rapid reaction forces: threat scenarios, and roles.
- Air lift capabilities and requirements.
- Rapid reaction helicopter requirements.
- Vehicle requirements for rapid reaction operations.
- Rapid reaction logistics: supporting rapid reaction operations.

I had been asked to deliver a paper on 'Key requirements for establishing and maintaining autonomous bases'. Drawing on our experiences in Africa and elsewhere, I gave the presentation, answered the many questions that followed, and felt rather flattered by the applause I received. Immediately after delivering my paper, I was approached by a senior British Army officer who asked for a copy of my presentation which I gave to him.

As I was still in the UK, Nico called and told me several journalists were trying to contact me. I took down their names and phone numbers and called them later that day.

Some of them, instead of trying to determine what was actually going on in Sierra Leone, immediately accosted me telephonically, again claiming that 'undisclosed sources in South Africa' had informed them Executive Outcomes was committing atrocities in Sierra Leone and then blaming them on the RUF. We were also, they said, taking great pleasure in killing women and children. I was furthermore asked to justify our actions against the 'freedom fighters of the RUF' who, according to them, were simply trying to make Sierra Leone a better place for all its citizens. As I was paying for the international phone calls in the hope of setting the record straight, I terminated the abusive calls.

I returned to South Africa shortly thereafter, angry and bitter about the game the media and their sources were playing. They were unwilling to examine the agendas of their 'undisclosed sources', and uninterested in following up on claims those sources had made.

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Bert Sachse, along with his senior staff, felt that with the pressure on Freetown relieved, it was time to deny the RUF its funding and cripple the movement once and for all. Such an action would also make the government financially viable, enable the restoration of services, place the rebels on the defensive, remove the terror under which the local inhabitants had to live, and show the SLA that the rebels could indeed be defeated. This would, in any future negations, place the government in a position of strength. More importantly, the ordinary people had to be shown that the rebels were not invisible[308] or invincible[309] and could be tracked down and killed.

Planning thus started for a new offensive aimed at taking the war to the RUF, gaining the initiative, increasing the operational tempo, and forcing the rebels to approach the negotiating table, leave the country, or die.

Our men had by now also learnt that the jungle was neutral and favoured those who were willing to exploit it. The initial problems (dense vegetation, limited vision, navigation, restricted movement, and close-range firefights) had been resolved, and the men were ready to take on the RUF on their own turf.

The new broad military campaign envisaged by EO's planning staff in Sierra Leone consisted of five phases:

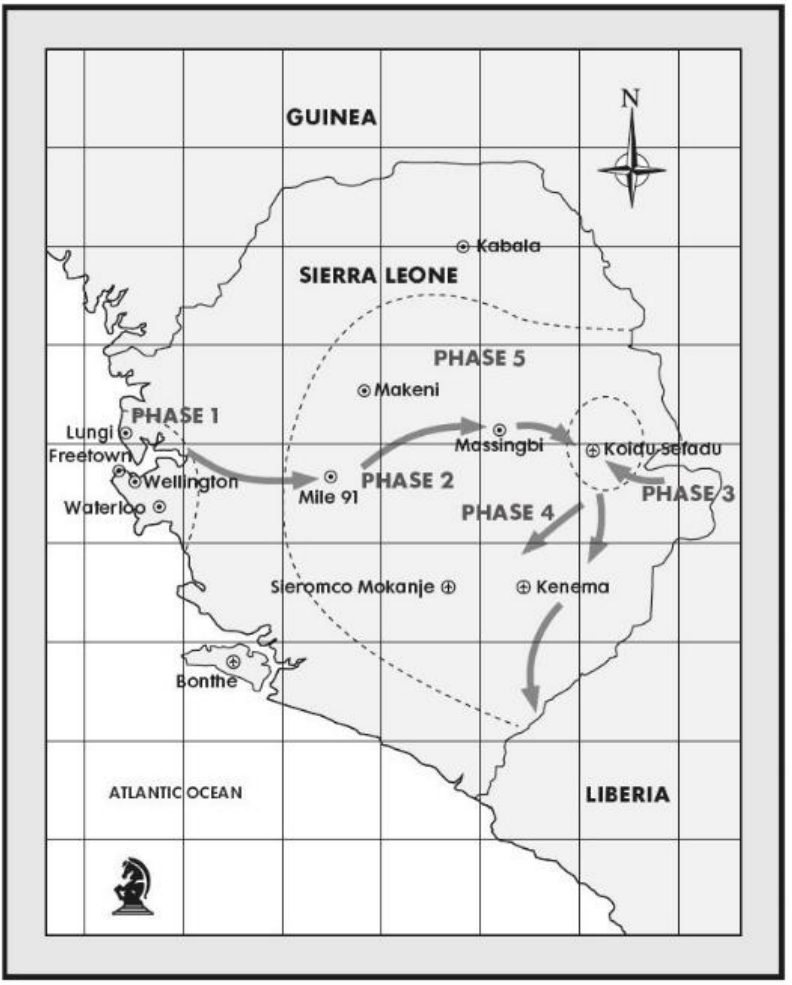
Phase 1: Clear the RUF threat to the east of Freetown

Phase 2: Retake the diamond mining town of Koidu, in the Kono district Phase 3: Dominate the diamond areas and clear the roads towards Liberia Phase 4: Identify, locate, attack, and destroy the RUF HQ

Phase 5: Conduct area operations throughout Sierra Leone

As Phase 1 had been successfully completed, it was time to commence with Phase 2—retake Koidu.

Koidu,[310] is the capital of Kono district in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone and the country's fourth largest city with a population of around 100 000 people. Located approximately 430 kilometres to the east of Freetown it is known as the 'breadbasket of Sierra Leone' but it is also rich in diamond deposits and mines. The RUF continually targeted Koidu for food and diamonds. The diamonds, of course, paid for their war and it was rumoured that (aside from the illegally mined stones being moved to South Africa) these were of great interest to Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. In close proximity to both Guinea and Liberia, Koidu also gave the rebels access to routes—other than through Freetown—via which to export their diamonds.



EO's broad campaign strategy to stabilise Sierra Leone

The SLA had once had a force there, but it had been isolated and vulnerable to attack. When, finally, their men had extricated themselves from the rebels' grip many had been forced to return via neighbouring Guinea. Others had fled into the jungle. Their journey

home to Freetown had taken more than two weeks, and their departure had left the local population once more in the grip of fear and firmly under RUF control.

Lafras told me about the plan to recapture Koidu in late-May. I knew that we would again be targeted by a media who seemed to delight in every opportunity to vilify the company, but every effort had to be made to interrupt the rebels' source of revenue, and stop them from brutalising the local inhabitants. Retaking Koidu and stabilising Kono District would accomplish just that.

Bert, Duncan, Roelf, and some senior staff, oblivious to the numerous disinformation campaigns being directed at the company in South Africa, put their heads down, devised their operational designs, and agreed to a course of action for retaking the town. By late-June 1995, their plans had been formulated and they were soon signed off by the president and Brigadier Maada Bio.

The operation, due to commence on 24 June, required an advance of approximately 450 kilometres into the interior—an area the SLA had long since ceased to venture into. The virtually impenetrable jungle would preclude an advance over a wide front and restrict movement to the few existing roads.

A 50-man EO team would lead the advance and attack on Koidu. Joining them would be Fred Marafono,[311] an ex-British SAS sergeant and a Fijian national. Fred, although not employed by EO, was known as a man who could keep his cool under very adverse conditions. He also knew his way around, having lived in Sierra Leone for some time, and had offered his services as a guide. An SLA force of two infantry companies under the command of SLA colonel Tom Nyuma, NPRC secretary of state for the Eastern Province, would follow the force and act as their reserve.

The EO force that would carry out the operation was tiny compared to the much larger rebel force that dominated Koidu Town and surrounds. They had at their disposal, two well-used BMPs, two fairly dilapidated Land Rovers, a few dodgy Bedford trucks, and a Nissan Safari commandeered by an SLA commander and his bodyguards. Two low-bed vehicles were contracted to move the BMPs closer to the objective by road to save their tracks. Support weapons were sorely lacking: the force had one 120mm mortar, an 82mm mortar, and two improvised 60mm patrol mortars. The air assets that would support this force included the two Mi-17 utility helicopters and the Mi-24 attack helicopter.

An EO crewed BMP-2 in Sierra Leone (photo: Jim Hooper)

Despite having to ready themselves for an advance across treacherous and restrictive terrain with such a small force, the men were buoyant and confident about being able to overwhelm and take their objective. Duncan estimated that the combat force would require at least fourteen days to conduct its advance, secure the route, and seize Koidu from the RUF. The planning staff were also well aware that security leaks from within the RSLMF[312] HQ in Freetown would reveal the axis of the advance to the rebels who would no doubt lay numerous deliberate and hasty ambushes en route.

Then, the unexpected happened.

The Springbok rugby team had made it through to the Rugby World Cup final and was due to play the deciding match on 24 June—also D-Day for the commencement of the advance. To our men in Sierra Leone, it would not do to advance on Koidu without at least knowing the result of the game. The NRPC gave permission for the operation to be delayed by one day so that the men could watch the game on television. D-Day was shifted to 25 June.

Early on the morning of what we considered to be a great rugby day, Lafras asked me what I was doing that afternoon.

"Nothing much. I guess I'll watch the Rugby World Cup final on TV. Why?" "I just happen to have a spare ticket for the match—if you are interested."

I didn't need a second invitation. Along with Tony Buckingham, who was passing through en route to Namibia on business, we watched the Springboks beating the All Blacks, and Francois Pienaar, the Springbok captain with President Mandela alongside him, hoisting the World Cup above their heads. It was a moment to treasure.

In Sierra Leone, members of the British High Commission joined the EO men in front of the television set and cheered the Springboks on to victory.

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Early on the morning of 25 June 1995, final orders were issued at the Benguema Training Camp (BTC) and the force commenced its advance on Koidu at 06:00. The advance was commanded by Roelf, with Renier Hugo as his second-in-command. Renier led the small vanguard with Fred Marafono (also known as 'Fearless Fred') beside him, but Fred's reckless approach to doing things quickly led to disagreements. Roelf was forced to intervene and advise Fred that the advance would move at the speed determined by EO—and no one else. Fred reluctantly accepted this and matters between him and Renier soon improved.

EO members with Fred Marafuno (second from right) in Sierra Leone (photo: Al J Venter)

As the column headed towards the interior, civilians came out of hiding to encourage the men and cheer them on. Others quickly tried to link up with the convoy to travel along to Koidu as the road had been quiet and unused for some time. Thundering overhead and giving top cover was the Mi-24 gunship piloted by Carl Alberts and Arthur Walker, seeking out targets of opportunity before returning to land at Makeni, refuel and await strike orders from the advancing force.

It was surmised that RUF sympathisers had already warned the rebels that a force was on its way to retake Koidu and relieve the pressure in the Kono district.

To speed up the tempo of the advance and discourage ambushes along their route, Roelf decided to drop a mortar bomb or two onto anticipated ambush positions to force the rebels to expose themselves prematurely. Where this was not possible, the men reconnoitred defiles for possible rebel ambush positions on foot.

Rebel movement was observed ahead of the advance approximately twenty kilometres east of Massingbi. The terrain afforded the RUF numerous opportunities to lure the force into an ambush, and isolate, bind, and overwhelm it.

Renier directed the gunship onto the target and all hell was let loose as the Mi- 24's Gatling gun ripped-off 4 000 rounds per minute at the rebel ambush position. It caught the rebels by complete surprise. This was rapidly followed up with an AGS-17 grenade strike. The ambush position was quickly decimated and followed up, and Renier's forces dismounted for an assault with the BMP-2s delivering fire support, the latter having already been off-loaded from the low-bed transporters. The panic- stricken rebels were pursued by 82mm mortar fire.

The rebels had prepared their ambush with approximately 100 men, of which fifteen were confirmed killed. Blood trails indicated that many more had been wounded, and abandoned weapons and ammunition littered the ambush position.

Unable to stop and conduct a thorough search of the ambush area, the force continued to Massingbi, arriving there in the late afternoon.

I was soon thereafter notified of the situation and the progress of the advance. On hearing that EO had suffered no casualties, I heaved a deep sigh of relief.

A tactical HQ was established at an old school that had been burnt down by the RUF, and that was where our men bedded down for the night. An SLA infantry company was tasked to guard the nearby town. That night, during a heavy downpour, an SLA officer warned our men that they were going to encounter heavy RUF resistance the following day and could expect the rebels to inflict heavy casualties on the advance and the men of EO. One of the men later told me that he had considered this comment to be a warning that the SLA were going to run back to Freetown when the first shots were fired.

On the morning of 26 June 1995, the order of march for the advance was confirmed. Orders were issued, and once more it set off for the next objective, an isolated SLA garrison in the town of Bumpe.

Every defile and likely ambush position was reconnoitred and cleared of rebels before the advance continued. On many occasions, the Mi-24 was at hand to provide close air support or to strike identified or potential rebel positions. Roelf's cautious approach would not only save the lives of EO and SLA men, it would also claim several rebel lives.

One of the men later recounted the first contact they had that morning:

The RUF, lying in wait, did not expect the cautious approach decided on by Roelf. The small reconnaissance team quickly located the rebels' ambush position and called in an Mi-24 strike.

Now with Juba at the controls, the gunship flew in low and fast and hit the enemy with the Mi-24's Gatling gun. Before our men could even get to the ambush position to launch a ground assault, the stunned rebels broke ranks and fled back into the jungle in disarray, hoping to escape the Mi-24's imminent return.

As Juba circled back to the strike area, he saw the rebels seeking cover in another old and badly damaged school building. He swooped in and devastated them with the Gatling gun. The few survivors fled back into the jungle in a blind panic. By now, EO forces had arrived on the scene and they launched a small follow-up operation on the routed rebels.

Leading the pursuit were Renier and Fred, supposedly supported by an SLA infantry team. When they glanced back, they found that the SLA infantry had decided not to follow them into the jungle, leaving them to do the follow-up on their own. Two men, following a fleeing enemy through unknown jungle terrain didn't offer the best of odds, so they wisely decided to abandon the follow-up as they couldn't continue without support. Besides, the jungle canopy was too dense for them to utilise Juba's gunship—and the RUF were probably running too fast for them to catch anyway.

The ambush position was swept and several bodies and numerous blood trails leading into the jungle were found. In their haste to escape the Mi-24's onslaught, the RUF had abandoned their dead along with their weapons and ammunition.

Typical terrain EO's forces had to move through to locate and annihilate RUF forces (photo: unknown)

Realising that this group of rebels had probably lost their enthusiasm for attacking the column, Roelf ordered the advance to continue. A further seven actions were fought against the RUF that day. At every anticipated ambush position, our men would dismount from their vehicles and sweep ahead on foot with the vehicles ready to race into the area and provide fire support once contact had been made. This was something the SLA had never done—and the RUF had never expected. At each position, the rebels were taken by surprise and numerous bodies were found after each ambush, but Roelf didn't want to stop and waste time counting the dead after each contact. The bodies were left where they fell for the jungle—or their comrades and wild animals, to claim them.

Along the route, the force passed numerous abandoned, deserted, and burnt down villages. Human life was noticeably absent. Rotting corpses weren't.

At a bridge crossing some kilometres from Bumpe, a half-hearted ambush was sprung as the lead vehicles crossed a small bridge. The EO team that had dismounted to clear and secure the bridge immediately retaliated with an assault, only to discover that the ambush had been sprung by SLA troops. They soon realised that it was a 'blue-onblue'[313] contact and fortunately, no casualties were reported. After having received a few deft slaps on the head from SLA colonel Tom Nyuma, the leader of the group, a sergeant, explained that they had, out of fear for their lives, left Bumpe and fled. The threat had been from their own colleagues with whom they had had a disagreement and who no doubt would have killed them had they remained there. The deserters were not sure if the garrison was still standing or if it had been overrun by rebels. They had, on hearing the vehicles, assumed it might be a mobile RUF force approaching. The SLA troops were absorbed into the advance

Shortly before last light, the force neared the road intersection near Bumpe. The isolated SLA garrison greeted them with jubilation—after having recovered from their surprise at seeing white and black men from South Africa working together to affect their rescue. While they were being debriefed, it transpired that there were indications that the RUF had been preparing to launch a large-scale attack on the SLA positions at Bumpe.

A tactical HQ was quickly established on the outskirts of Bumpe. Bert and Duncan were advised of its position by radio and this message was rapidly relayed back to

Pretoria. The advance was making far better progress than anticipated. The SLA decided to enter Bumpe and spend the night within the security of the town.

Orders were promptly issued and the men prepared the best defensive positions they could in the fading light. If the RUF were indeed planning an attack on Bumpe, they would get a reception of lead they hadn't anticipated.

The RUF struck before dawn.

Sleeping in all-round defensive positions, the EO and SLA men were woken by the sound of gunfire erupting in and around Bumpe before first light.

A group of approximately 120 rebels, probably thinking that the force had already passed through the town, launched their attack. The SLA fire they drew, as uncoordinated and undisciplined as it was, seemed to change their minds—as well as the direction of their attack. The SLA, however, managed to kill seven RUF members, and two wounded rebels were captured soon thereafter.

Under fire from the SLA, the RUF force withdrew—unbeknownst to them, directly towards the overnight defensive positions the EO men had prepared and into a fierce barrage of coordinated fire. Although firing back, they tried to disengage and move away but were soon hit with a 120mm mortar bomb. Roelf gave the 'fire for effect' order and several more 120mm and 82mm bombs rained down on them. They lost little time in turning tail and leaving the area as fast as they could, leaving the bodies of their dead and dying behind.

The SLA re-joined our men at the tactical HQ and offered them some of their 'Pega Packs', a local brew of distilled brandy. They were jubilant about having driven off the RUF attack and wanted to celebrate. Their offers were turned down as a fight still lay ahead. One of our men told the SLA commander, Colonel Tom Nyuma, "We drink after a fight, not before it."

A typical Sierra Leonean 'pega pack' (photo: unknown)

The withdrawing RUF were rapidly followed up by Renier and two of our men known as 'Bicycle' and 'Gaddafi'. Following them in support was a Land Rover mounted with a DShK machine gun driven by Johan, one of our signallers. That day happened to be Johan's birthday.

Cutting through the dense jungle, the three men quickly located the RUF force and were surprised to find the unsuspecting rebels casually strolling along the road in single file, rifles slung across their shoulders as though they didn't have a worry in the world. Our men called in the Mi-24 and coordinated the indirect fire of our mortar teams. The RUF were caught unawares and lost 25 of their men in a matter of minutes.

With the RUF hurriedly leaving the area in total disarray, Juba landed the Mi-24 on the road, handed Johan a beer as a birthday present, and took off again.

As Renier later told me:

It was quite surreal. Here was this contact with the RUF still in progress. There were still bursts of sporadic fire and our mortar guys were still firing their mortars, hoping to kill, wound, or scare the RUF even more. The signaller—I can't recall his name—was slowly driving the Land Rover along the road to support us and suddenly Juba landed the Mi-24 in the road, gave him a beer for his birthday, then lifted off again to hunt the RUF. I wasn't really aware of why Juba had landed, so after this mess I walked up to the Land Rover and also wished him a happy birthday.

He looked at me in total surprise and said, "You guys are all fucking mad—stay away from me!"

By then several villagers and some members of the SLA had come running to where the RUF had been caught and killed on the road. To the horror of our men, they immediately started hacking at and mutilating the bodies of the dead rebels. Arriving on the scene, Renier and his men had to threaten the villagers and the SLA at gunpoint to make them leave the corpses alone. After several tense moments, the stand-off ended and the locals and the SLA left the contact area. This was cannibal country and the locals were probably upset about having been denied breakfast.

Meanwhile, Roelf had followed up on a different group of rebels and soon reached the nearby airfield of Yengema without any resistance from the RUF. A stand-off bombardment was launched in the general direction of the RUF's flight, hoping to drive them deeper into the jungle.

The RUF rebels were often high on drugs and believed their 'medicine' made them invisible (photo: dailymail.com)

Realising the rebels had now fled the area and would most probably not stop running for some time, Roelf ordered Renier and his men to form up and continue the advance on Koidu.

After a brief stop for lunch, Juba flew ahead and was soon circling over Koidu, reporting that the rebels were leaving the town in droves and fleeing into the hills and the jungle.

Roelf pushed the column hard, stopped short of the town, and sent in a team to conduct a reconnaissance of the area to confirm rebel positions.

As they approached the town, the men were almost overwhelmed by the sickening smell of rotting flesh. They found several severed heads stacked on a traffic circle and there were decomposing corpses in the streets; people the RUF had left to rot where they had fallen. Wild dogs and pigs were eating many of the fresher corpses. Swarms of flies settled on everyone. Such were the horrors of the conflict in Sierra Leone.

Several of the men were physically sick at the sights and smells that greeted them. On 27 June 1995, Koidu fell without any rebel resistance. The advance had taken three days and, under Roelf and Renier's command and leadership, had suffered no casualties. Koidu was deserted. While sweeping the town for any rebels hiding there, the men found two destitute and malnourished young boys whose parents had left them in a mosque, hoping that the RUF would leave them alone. A small group of about fifteen lepers had also taken shelter in an old church. Malnourished children and lepers were obviously not on the RUF's menu.

The force quickly set about consolidating its position in and around Koidu, and giving the locals whatever support and assistance they could. Several small security patrols were launched to assess the area and identify potential rebel approaches. Roelf established his tactical HQ on Casino Hill, so named because of a colonial casino that dominated the area. This gave him and his men a good vantage point.

Bert and Duncan were promptly informed that Koidu had fallen. Finding it difficult to believe, Duncan asked Roelf to confirm the report. Roelf reiterated that Koidu was now under the control of the SLA. Duncan had anticipated a two-week operation; it had taken three days.

When the message was relayed to Pretoria shortly thereafter, Nico immediately sent a fax to me in the UK. I, too, couldn't believe what I was reading and called Nico by phone for confirmation. The RUF, like UNITA at Cafunfu, had now lost one of their primary sources of income. Their ability to continue their war of terror was nearing its end. We had no doubt they would attempt to retake it or extract vengeance on the locals in the area.

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The news that Koidu was once more under government control was greeted with great excitement and jubilation in Freetown, and people partied and danced in the streets in several cities, towns, and villages across Sierra Leone. President Strasser was equally thrilled to hear the news, as were his officers in the NPRC. Within the ranks of the South African media, EO was condemned for its 'destabilising activities' in Sierra Leone. It was

again falsely and maliciously claimed that we were being paid in diamonds and had been awarded diamond concessions. The media's apparent inability to determine the agendas of their sources, as well as verify the so-called 'intelligence' they were fed, was astounding.

Oblivious to the adverse publicity EO was attracting, Roelf immediately started mounting aggressive fighting patrols in and around Koidu to stabilise the area and send a clear message to the RUF: "we are here to stay." Indirect weapons were positioned and fire tasks registered with the mortars. The surviving locals soon began returning to their shattered town, hoping to be able to bury their dead and pick up their lives where they had left off. Team leaders such as Simon Witherspoon, Rich Nicol, and the Du Preez twins, were determined to make sure the rebels got the message and their actions saved the lives of countless innocent locals.

Our men soon learnt just how callously and viciously the RUF had treated the civilians there. A woman reported having fallen victim to rebel activities in early May 1995. They had first fired into her house (wounding her in the arm) and then broken down her door. Why her house had been chosen, she didn't know. With her were her husband and two sons, as well as a pregnant woman, her two small children, and several young men. The rebels murdered almost everyone in the house except for her and some of the other women who were taken outside and repeatedly raped. After this some of the women were killed. Her daughter was repeatedly stabbed in the back, shoulder, and chest and died a few hours later. The woman's story was not an isolated one. Some people had been herded into their homes and burnt alive. Pregnant women had been suspended upside down and slit open from vagina to throat and left to die. Others had burning stakes pushed up their vaginas and anuses. Several were cooked and eaten. Many had their arms and legs hacked off with machetes. Suffering a swift death at the hands of the rebels was considered a blessing.

Child victims of the RUF's atrocities. The world remained largely silent— until EO arrived in Sierra Leone (photo: Teun Voeten)

The horrors inflicted on the local population by the RUF were distressing to our men, despite many of them having witnessed the worst that conflict and war can bring.

On 28 June, Duncan flew into Koidu accompanied by members of the Army General Staff and two international journalists.

Despite EO having cleared out a brutal group of cannibalistic murderers, the media, particularly in South Africa, were bitterly angry about this latest blow to the rebels.

The UN was equally concerned about our activities.

Anger and condemnation towards us grew—along with hopes that we would be swiftly evicted from Sierra Leone by the UN or some other force.

The old adage 'If you stand for nothing, you will fall for everything' certainly applied to our detractors.

Regardless of what anyone said or intimated, EO had successfully completed Phase 2 of the campaign strategy to clear Sierra Leone of the Revolutionary United Front. Ahead, lay Phase 3—clearing the road towards Liberia—and many more battles with the RUF.

29:
Dominating Koidu and the Kono District

Phase 3 of the campaign to liberate Sierra Leone from the yoke of RUF terror called for the domination, stabilisation, and control of the diamond rich areas in Kono district and the clearing of the roads to Liberia. With this in mind, Roelf and his men prepared themselves for more action.

Only 50 EO men stayed behind to defend Koidu and patrol the town, so Roelf made sure they would be ready for anything the rebels could throw at them. Expecting a counter-attack the night Koidu fell, the men slept lightly with weapons at the ready, but the RUF appeared to have had enough for a while and didn't venture near the force. Later intelligence indicated that almost 200 rebels had been killed in the previous two days' fighting. The wounded had been taken across to neighbouring Guinea and Liberia where many more had died. The war had changed; the RUF would no longer be able to attack and terrorise the local population with impunity.

Koido's main street several years after the war ended (photo: fellowsblog.kiva.org)

The following morning, 28 June, a group of armed men cautiously but openly approached the tactical HQ and introduced themselves as 'Kamajors'. They were a tribal police force that had been established to protect the Kono tribe and its livestock from human and animal threats. They were surprised to see white and black men from South Africa in SLA uniforms, apparently taking control of Koidu, and wanted to know whether the inhabitants under their protection were safe to return. Roelf answered in the affirmative and the Kamajors returned to their jungle hideouts, excited about being able to bring the townsfolk back home.

With the RUF neutralised around Koidu, the villagers started returning en masse. Within three days more than 20 000 people returned to the shattered town. Some, desperate to rebuild their lives, soon established small markets in the town centre. Others searched frantically for children and other family members and friends who had been lost

in the chaos of the RUF's murderous rampage. Accompanying the returning inhabitants were numerous RSLMF troops who, somewhat sheepishly, reported for duty after having fled their posts when their officers abandoned them.

Roelf despatched our medics and support personnel to give whatever meagre assistance they could to the returnees but there wasn't much they could do to ease their pain. Given the disinformation published in the South African media (that EO was smuggling medicines out of South Africa and had become a 'major player in the illegal medicine trade') we had stopped collecting time-expired medicines from South African hospitals and as a result, we had very limited medical supplies. It struck me as incredibly sad that the DFA and MI were willing to impact so negatively on innocent civilian lives.

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The promised one-month deadline given to me by the authorities in Mozambique following our visit had been exceeded by several weeks but there was still a deathly silence. I held my breath for a while longer but in late-July 1995 I felt compelled to write a letter to Abdul Adamo of Sabacor Limitada:

The policing situation within Mozambique is once again an issue being raised with businessmen within and outside of South Africa.

I have, through a very reliable source, been told that the United Nations has allocated a fair size of funding for the training of the Mozambique Police Force. Could you possibly follow-up this matter for us with the Ministry of the Interior to confirm/deny this information and also to determine the possibility of ... providing the training. (I understand that the Portuguese translation of my proposal I presented was forwarded to you).

I was taken aback when Abdul phoned me only minutes after I had faxed him the letter. He claimed that the Minister wanted to make use of our services but was unable to do so.

"Apparently, the South African government has told Mozambique to break all contact with you and your company. According to the Minister, dire consequences will follow if we award any contract to you. Your Foreign Affairs really seem to hate you."

With that, our plans to get involved in solving Mozambique's problems ended. I would later learn from an agent in Military Intelligence that the Department of Foreign Affairs had indeed issued threats to several African governments and warned them not to talk to us. According to the agent, DFA didn't want EO working for any African government because they had their own agendas, along with preferred companies and structures that they wanted to punt in Africa. Besides, these elements needed to continue destabilisation and illegal activities that EO would unquestionably have put a stop to.

A report to this effect was even submitted to Military Intelligence and subsequently passed to me. I assumed that they were really worried about us uncovering the extent to which DFA, MI, and their agents were still involved with RENAMO[314] and UNITA. If that was exposed, it would compromise their long-laid plans to destabilise southern Africa. It would also expose and compromise their other illegal money- making activities.

Fortunately there were other governments in Africa—and beyond—that required our advice, assistance and expertise—and who would not be cowed by DFA and MI's lies and threats.

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A relative calm slowly settled over Koidu. Life seemed to have become more or less normal for the locals. A few days after taking Koidu, Roelf received another visit, this time from the chairman of the Council of Chiefs.[315] He was accompanied by several government ministers and senior officials from the deposed Sierra Leonean government (all of whom expressed joy at meeting the men who had given the RUF such a hiding). They were escorted by Kamajors. After pledging their full support to EO, they asked us to assist and protect their people and villages wherever possible. In return, they offered to give us their fullest support.

Members of the Kamajor (photo: Patrick Robert)

Commanding the EO force in Koidu, Roelf was now forced to wear two hats: EO commander and 'diplomat'. He and Renier agreed to protect the locals from any RUF threats and actions and also undertook to provide whatever support their small force could give. Expressing their satisfaction at the meeting, the delegation left for their homes.

Simon Witherspoon later told me:

It was strange to see these chiefs enter Koidu, escorted by the Kamajors. Their surprise at seeing white men wearing SLA uniforms was equally strange. Nevertheless, they were very pleased to see us there. Obviously the bush telegraph had announced our arrival. Amongst ourselves we concluded that if we had the support of the tribal chiefs and the Kamajors, we could really make a positive impact in the Kono District.

We had learnt, in Angola that protecting and supporting the local inhabitants always paid dividends. They would become an in-place early warning system and provide vital

intelligence on the area and any strangers entering it. The bush telegraph was often faster than any collection operation.

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Our men, supported by the ever-present Mi-24 and Mi-17s, were quick to establish a semblance of peace and stability in the area surrounding the town. From the tactical HQ and its defensive perimeter on Casino Hill, small EO fighting patrols combed the surrounding area looking for rebels. Patrols were also seen on the streets of the town and were met with friendliness and very little resistance. Where rebels were encountered, swift and aggressive assaults were made on them. The sounds of the odd firefight echoed through the hills and valleys, but the rebels seemed to have lost their heart for fighting our men. They had also lost their source of diamonds as well as the initiative—something they had held for a long time—and they melted away into the jungle and remained there quietly when EO entered the areas they still controlled.

Journalists from several countries flew to Koidu to interview Roelf and his men on EO's successful advance and recapture of the town. Given my ongoing experiences with the South African media's constant games of deceit and deception, I was not pleased to learn this. I had no desire to have the media (some of whom I regarded as 'lower than scum') reporting on anything we were doing. Our press releases were consistently ignored in favour of lies in any case. I was still shocked by the ferocity of the media campaign against EO for having denied the rebel forces their source of income.

Roelf's interviews did not disappoint me although it was clear that some of the journalists he had spoken to had subtly inserted their own agendas.

American journalist Elizabeth Rubin, a contributing editor to Harper's Magazine and The Forward later wrote:

Colonel Roelf, his Afrikaner officers, and a few dozen black troops ... their role as the lords of Kono and the watchdogs of the mines. If there was a problem with a thief, a rapist, a renegade soldier, or an illicit miner, the locals went to 'Colonel Rudolph', not to the police. One blistering hot afternoon a group of women came to request protection for a festival and soccer game they were holding down at the river. Roelf promised to help. 'I am the ombudsman,' he told me.

Some journalists were especially keen to get to Koidu and witness EO's 'illegal activities' first-hand, no doubt believing their own lies about us having captured Koidu for ourselves so that we could mine the diamonds. A typical example was an African-American journalist who hid herself within the confines of a Mi-17 making the supply run from Freetown to Koidu. Her arrival there surprised everyone.

The men admired her courage and ingenuity, but told her in no uncertain terms that EO had ceased speaking to the media. Realising that the men of EO would not discuss their work with her, she turned her charms towards the SLA officers, determined to get her

scoop. Whether or not she was successful is unknown but no earth-shattering article ever followed her visit.

Despite my utter disdain for those who posed as journalists, I was aware that someone had to talk to them occasionally, if only to put our case on record. At an early morning board meeting, concerns had been raised about the possibility of apparently conflicting stories fuelling the ongoing frenzy of lies and, despite my protestations, it was decided that I should be the only one to address them. We had also agreed that several of the reporters maligning us were simply carrying out somebody's instructions with little or no regard to what was actually happening on the ground. I was sure that many of them had never even heard of Sierra Leone until it had been reported that we were in that country. We decided not to waste any more breath on them and chose to focus on ethical media correspondents who would report the facts objectively.

Earlier in August, Lafras, Nico, and I had discussed the impact the media war was having on us. Having to read an almost daily barrage of disinformation and lies was exhausting us and me in particular. The intelligence I was receiving from SIG agents made it very clear that MI and DFA were feeding their agents in the media as much disinformation as possible in order to swamp out any responses we might give. Johann Smith had also told me about Cleary's duplicitous letters to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Anglo American's Peter Gush. I had noticed that the people who had been so concerned about UNITA's loss of Cafunfu in 1994 were the same people who were now concerned about the RUF's loss of the Koidu diamond mines and the domination of Kono District. It did not take a special kind of genius to understand why.

Lafras discussed the possibility of allowing correspondent Al J. Venter[316] to accompany an EO force in Sierra Leone. I told Lafras that under no circumstances was Venter to be allowed to deploy with EO forces. Lafras ignored my decision and I learnt a few days later that Venter[317] had arrived in Sierra Leone and been allowed to go to Koidu with Lafras' permission. I was furious as I viewed this as a deliberate attempt to undermine my decisions. Lafras apologised and I left the matter at that.

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Exploiting the position they found themselves in and realising the need to constantly communicate with townsfolk and villagers from outlying areas, Roelf decided to hold a public gathering. Not only would this reassure the people of EO's intentions, it would also give the locals open access to EO if they wished to lodge complaints against the SLA or report any information on RUF activities in their areas. Things were quickly arranged and a list of prominent speakers was decided on—one of course being Roelf.

His speech, which he gave after all the other speakers had had their say, was short and sweet: He undertook to drive the RUF out of Eastern Province and indeed Sierra Leone by Christmas, 1995. This was met with rapturous applause, dancing, singing, and cheers of enthusiasm.

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We still had a number of men in Angola so Lafras was forced to divide his time between South Africa, Angola, and Sierra Leone. He would often arrive at our Danny Street offices late at night, and in a state of complete exhaustion, brief me on the situations in both countries, our men's attitude and morale, the problems they were experiencing, and how he thought we could or should rectify shortcomings that had emerged. Similarly, I was travelling to different parts of Africa and Asia seeking new contracts for EO.

Although the Strategic Intelligence Group (SIG) was still operating in Angola and South Africa, the distance to Sierra Leone and a lack of sources resulted in it playing no definitive role in that country. While it could monitor developments in MI, the DFA, Cleary's offices, and the media, Carl Dietz and his intelligence team were better positioned to develop, recruit, and run their own sources. The signals intercept operations run by our signallers in Freetown were adding credible and actionable intelligence to Carl's efforts, but they were also especially keen to identify and determine the intentions of the agents and 'useful idiots' being run by our detractors in South Africa.

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In Sierra Leone, the Executive Outcomes men, apart from their fighting patrols, began a vigorous 'hearts-and-minds' campaign in the villages and towns. These operations were not only aimed at tending the sick and wounded, but included any other assistance the men could offer. This also served as a valuable intelligence collection effort as the villagers knew what was going on in their areas, and who belonged there and who didn't.

EO assault teams deployed by helicopter conducted numerous patrols and strikes to rid the area of RUF rebels (photo: unknown)

Illustrating the impact EO made on the lives of so many in Koidu was a Lebanese family, who, like so many residents had been forced to flee the terror visited upon them by the RUF. Returning to their damaged and looted home, they felt the need to express their gratitude and invited several of our senior staff to their home for dinner. The men were showered with praise and thanks, and spent a memorable evening relaxing and relishing the hospitality they were shown, away from the war and fighting.

In the coming days, the government decided that no operations would be undertaken in the Eastern Provinces—or indeed anywhere in Sierra Leone without EO's input and control. The RSLMF HQ in Freetown agreed and orders to that effect were issued. SLA units were immediately placed under command and control of EO and most of their officers gracefully accepted this arrangement.

EO patrols ventured deeper into the areas surrounding Kono District and as a whole, Kono became stabilised. When the RUF were encountered, aggressive action either killed them or put them to flight. EO's actions in that district were sure to impact on RUF morale elsewhere.

On one occasion, and acting on intelligence provided by the locals, the Kamajors guided an EO assault team (led by Simon Witherspoon and his good friends, the Du Preez twins) to a small village where the RUF were resting. The last thing that passed through the minds of the four rebels who died, must have been the aggression and ferocity with which they were assaulted. Those who ran probably had the same thoughts.

Sometimes villagers brought news that the rebels were infiltrating back into the Kono District and targeting villagers in outlying areas—in some instances, even their own families. The EO men did everything they could to put an end to these incursions and show the villagers that their concerns were of equal importance to EO's men.

With numerous small rebel incursions into Kono District—especially from Liberia—the completion of Phase 3: clearing the road to Liberia, was inevitably delayed. Despite the positive impact made by EO across the country, Sierra Leone was still a fragile state. Indeed, it was more a failed state. If nothing else, this gave our detractors much to rejoice about.

Noting that Koidu was relatively free from rebel activity, the SLA flew in reinforcements to assist our men in the ongoing area-domination operations around the town and extending deeper into RUF-dominated areas. Roadblocks manned by SLA troops were established at strategic points, random checks and searches were carried out, and soon the residents began to feel even more secure. However, before long, a new problem arose: the men had to contend with SLA troops wanting to mine diamonds rather than protecting the area as they were supposed to. As with the EO men (who had been read the riot act) the SLA troops were warned that stealing from the government and the people they were there to protect would, under no circumstances, be tolerated. Whereas enforcing this order was easy when it came to EO's men, it was not that easy enforcing it on the SLA.

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During that same period, a degree of professional animosity had developed between the EO Rapid Deployment Force (helicopter-borne) and the EO Mobile Force (vehicle-borne forces). This animosity stemmed primarily from disagreements regarding different approaches and tactics in combat operations. Although both forces wished to ensure a speedy conclusion to combat operations and see a return to stability and growth, the disagreement eventually required intervention from Roelf and Renier. I was not advised of

the professional animosity. Had I been, I would probably not have been as diplomatic as Roelf and Renier were in their efforts to resolve it.

On one occasion, a poor command decision was made by Cobus, an ex-paratrooper who commanded EO's heliborne forces at Koidu. He had been placed in command of an operation to take a small village named Baiama, situated approximately fifteen kilometres south of Koidu and on the road to Gandorhun. Taking the town would enable EO to stabilise and dominate the area around the village and possibly use it as a jumping-off point for the final part of Phase 3: clearing the road to Liberia.

Accompanying Cobus and the EO force were approximately 70 Kamajors—who were always keen to get involved and to lead the EO men towards rebel positions. Although disagreements arose between the heliborne forces and Jos' mobile forces on how to accomplish the operation, Baiama was eventually occupied after a start- stop beginning. The plan made provision for EO to attack and take the town, set out the defences, prepare the Kamajors to hold their position, and then remain with the Kamajors.

Disregarding the plan, Cobus decided to withdraw the EO forces and leave the town under Kamajor control. This decision was to prove fatal; shortly after the EO force departed, the RUF attacked the Kamajors. Seriously outgunned, the Kamajors broke ranks, abandoned their defensive positions, and fled into the bush—back to Koidu and the safety of EO. I later learnt that some of the Kamajors had been killed and their bodies brutalised by the rebels. Others had apparently drowned whilst trying to cross a swollen river. In their blood-letting, the RUF also killed several villagers.

Not only was this loss regarded as a tactical victory by the rebels, it also reflected badly on EO. Many of the inhabitants in Baiama believed that EO was to blame for having left the Kamajors without decisive command and control and the disciplined firepower our men would pour into any rebel attack. I was deeply angry when I learnt about the situation and spoke to Lafras, instructing him to impress on EO's commanders in the field that never again were they to leave either the Kamajors or the SLA without effective and decisive command and control. Lafras wanted to fire Cobus in disgrace but I had also made mistakes as a young officer and had it not been for experienced NCO's under my command, some of those mistakes could have resulted in the deaths of others. I believed the same could be said of any inexperienced officer. Thankful that EO had not suffered any casualties in that situation, I convinced Lafras to leave Cobus in his post but told him we would need to monitor his style of command. Lafras reluctantly accepted my argument.

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A bearded Roelf van Heerden posing with members of the Kono Consultative Committee (photo: Roelf van Heerden)

To coordinate and maintain the relative stability in the area, Roelf established the Kono Consultative Committee (KCC). Its aim was to create a discussion forum for senior officials in the Kono district, and encourage the local inhabitants to throw their energy behind improving their own lot. EO could keep them safe in that endeavour but they also needed to show the will to advance matters in the district. The KCC was a huge boon for everyone involved as the officials and the inhabitants felt that finally someone was listening—and taking action to reverse the losses suffered during the RUF's occupation. When I initially learnt of the KCC, I had my doubts but agreed to fully support it. My reservations were later disproved as it became a valuable tool for EO in that area. With Roelf as its chairman, the KCC rapidly became popular among the locals.

The KCC functioned well—not only as a forum for rumour, innuendo, requests for help, and feel-good stories—but also as a valuable conduit for actionable intelligence. In late August, the villagers informed Roelf that a large RUF concentration was building up in the town of Gandorhun located almost in the centre of Eastern Province and approximately 30 kilometres south of Yengema.[318] Not only did this pose a threat to the villagers in the area, it also encroached on EO's areas of responsibility and influence. Gandorhun was, as the crow flies, approximately 50 kilometres from the Liberian border. We knew by then that Liberia was covertly providing support, training, and advice to the RUF—apparently being given by South Africans under the guise of training Liberia's 'Presidential Guard'. This cross-border support had been sweetened with Sierra Leonean diamonds which were being sold to dealers and traders in Liberia. Many of these eventually found their way to Belgium, Israel, and South Africa.

Carl Dietz, running EO's intelligence operations in Freetown, would later tell me:

The RUF never truly recovered from the hammering we gave them at Freetown and surrounds. Radio intercepts and sources reported that Sankoh, the RUF's leader, was facing mounting anger and resistance from his so-called officers. Impacting further on these fuckers was the fact that Roelf and Renier had conquered Koidu and were stabilising

Kono District with a very small EO force. Sankoh knew the SLA had merely supported EO's advance rather than playing a significant role in that action.

The diamonds-for-money pool was drying up. To pacify his followers, Sankoh promised them that Koidu, and indeed Kono District, would be retaken and they would all share in its spoils. When this happened, he urged his officers, they were to make every inhabitant of Kono District pay the price for their losses at Koidu. We could only assume this would include rape, murder, torture, looting, and destruction of anything they could lay their dirty hands on. I urged Bert to let us attack and kill as many of these bastards as we could before they killed more innocent people.

Under pressure from Sankoh to retake Koidu, the rebels had gone on the rampage and occupied Gandorhun which they were now using as a base from which to build up forces for what they believed would be the campaign to recapture Koidu. The villagers, fearing they would be raped, tortured or killed, had fled the area. Thinking they were safe, the RUF were scouring the countryside for innocent and defenceless victims to kill or torture in an attempt to reassert their authority.

One morning in late August, shots from a nearby village called Werdu[319] came echoing through the valley. Werdu was well known to our men because they had frequently stopped there during their numerous fighting patrols throughout the area. Fearing the worst, they mounted their vehicles and sped off to investigate. They were too late.

As they neared the village they saw large plumes of smoke slowly rising through the jungle canopy. High above the village, vultures were already circling the burning village.

Dismounting from their vehicles, the men cautiously approached the village on foot. Several huts were still ablaze or smouldering, and the sickly smell of burnt human flesh hung heavily in the air. Some of the huts were filled with the remains of villagers who had been forced inside and burnt alive by the RUF, and a number of bodies lay strewn about.

Sickened by what they had seen, EO launched an immediate follow-up operation, tracking the rebels into the jungle and killing a number of them. Two were taken captive, and from them, the EO operatives extracted the full story of the raid.

The evening before, several score RUF had arrived in Werdu and turned the village into a living hell overnight. They had repeatedly raped the females, regardless of their ages. Seven-year-old girls had been gang-raped in front of their fathers, who had been forced at gunpoint to watch. Adolescent boys had been forced to rape their own mothers.

What followed was even worse.

After being raped, the women and girls had burning stakes rammed up their vaginas. After that, the village boys were ordered to shoot their own parents, or face certain death themselves. Horribly traumatised, they would make perfect press- ganged recruits for the RUF.

Still not satisfied with their orgy of torture and butchery, the rebels chopped hands, arms, noses, ears and other body parts off some of the villagers with their machetes. Several villagers had their eyes burnt out with red hot coals.

At the end of this frenzy of terror, the villagers who had not succumbed to the RUF's atrocities, were herded into huts which were then set on fire. Others were shot where they stood, either by the RUF or by their own children—while rifle barrels were held to their heads.

A typical RUF victim with her eyes burnt out after having been raped and shot by RUF rebels (photo: Pinterest.com).

At least 265 men, women, and children were brutalised and killed that night. The only survivors were two babies, no more than a few months old, both found lying beneath their murdered mothers. These children were taken back to Koidu and placed in the care of the villagers. One was later adopted by a family from Koidu and named 'Colonel Rudolph'—in honour of Roelf van Heerden, EO's commander at Koidu.

Still shocked and angered by what they had found, the men returned to Casino Hill to brief Roelf. They knew that the RUF had withdrawn in the direction of Gandorhun and they were determined to drive the rebels from their perceived safe haven and exact retribution. It was inconceivable that they should be allowed to get away with such atrocities. If this murderous rampage went unpunished, Roelf's promise, that by the end of December the RUF would be destroyed, would hold no more meaning than the empty words the locals had heard before, and they would lose faith in EO, just as they had lost faith in the NPRC and the RSLMF/SLA.

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It was equally inconceivable that the South African media were so pro-Sankoh and his rebels.

Journalist Jim Hooper, an American who had written extensively for the monthly magazine, Soldier of Fortune, requested permission to accompany EO on a limited operation in Sierra Leone. We had some doubts about Hooper; his past articles were highly dramatised and we were uncertain about whether he would report what was really happening truthfully and objectively. We argued about this amongst ourselves, but eventually agreed to allow him to accompany the men on a limited operation. Depending on what he wrote, we would consider imposing a total media black-out on our activities.

Lafras undertook to get permission from Bert and the RSLMF HQ, and advised Roelf and his men that Hooper was to accompany them on a limited duration operation.

A few days later, Lafras flew into Koidu with Hooper. Using the intelligence provided by the villagers in the area, Roelf and his men had already formulated a broad design for battle to attack the RUF base at Gandorhun which lay about 30 kilometres south of Werdu. The aim of the operation was to identify, locate, strike, and annihilate the RUF forces operating from Gandorhun and remove rebel threats from the road to Liberia.

The broad operational plan consisted of three phases:

Phase 1: The positioning of a forward observation post on the hills overlooking Gandorhun. The forward observation officer (FOO) selected for this mission was Renier Hugo, who had been tasked to direct fire from our mortar teams onto any RUF positions located in the town and surrounds.

Phase 2: A ground infiltration and assault on any RUF positions that had been located by the FOO. This assault would be led by Fred Marafono and would consist only of SLA troops. EO forces would act as stopper groups and conduct follow up operations if required.

Phase 3: The extraction of the EO teams and the domination of the area by means of fighting patrols undertaken by EO and the SLA.

The following morning, Fred and an SLA company commanded by SLA Captain Silla, left Casino Hill to begin their infiltration into the Gandorhun area. Their orders were to infiltrate to a predetermined start line close enough to allow Fred to observe rebel movement in the area and call down mortar fire (along with fire adjustments) on any RUF concentrations in the town.

Renier and his men were meanwhile flown in to the area by Mi-17 and established a position on a hill overlooking Gandorhun. The 82mm and 120mm mortar positions were determined, distances to the target were calculated, charges confirmed, and the tubes laid in the general direction of Gandorhun.

That night, there was a typical West African rain and thunderstorm that lasted for several hours.

Piet Crouwcamp, one of our signals officers and a man who had witnessed operations in both Angola and Sierra Leone told me what such a storm was like:

If you have never experienced the full effect of a Sierra Leone rainstorm, it can be very intimidating. The rain falls in bucket after bucket. Waterproof garments have no chance of keeping you dry. Everything gets wet—your sleeping bag, your food, your clothes—whatever you have gets soaking wet. You think it's never going to stop raining. It's actually bloody scary.

Hooper, not having the correct equipment with him, lay freezing in the mud. Some of our men took pity on him and shared their meagre equipment so that he could keep warm. Due to the deluge of rain, the men were forced to stay in position for a second night.

Renier used the time to scan the environs of Gandorhun with his night vision goggles (NVGs), looking for rebel campfires. The inhabitants had fled before the RUF's attack and occupation of their village, so he knew that each campfire was a rebel position, and he plotted them as targets for the mortar bombardment that would precede Fred and the SLA's assault the next morning.

At midnight, another tropical downpour struck them, and again the men lay shivering and shaking in the mud.

Before first light the following morning, and amidst a raging thunderstorm, Fred advised Renier that they had reached their start line and were waiting for him to commence his mortar pre-bombardment of the target. Renier gave the orders for the mortars to fire white phosphorous smoke bombs to facilitate easy fire adjustments. The thunderstorm masked the thud of the bombs as they hit their baseplates and flew towards the rebel positions Renier had plotted. The rebels were blissfully unaware that they were about to experience a devastating mortar bombardment.

Watching through his NVGs, Renier noted with satisfaction that the bombardment was on target and very few adjustments required. He gave the order to "fire for effect!",[320] and from their position on the high ground, the mortar crews dropped bomb after bomb into the mortar tubes. Renier observed the effects of the bombardment as the RUF positions were pounded. The brilliant flashes of the detonating mortar bombs were easy to spot so fire adjustment and control was relatively simple.

An indirect attack on their perceived safe-haven was the last thing the rebels had expected.

Disorientated, they stumbled around only to be knocked down by the screaming shrapnel that came at them from all directions. Several of the high-explosive bombs exploded in the jungle canopy, effectively becoming air-burst bombs. Many rebels were killed and many more wounded. The screams and calls for help from the wounded and dying continued for some time.

As dawn broke, Fred Marafono and Captain Silla and his SLA infantry company waited for orders to cross their start line and begin the ground attack. Renier initiated their attack with another mortar bombardment.

As the deadly mortar barrage lifted, Fred, leading the SLA company, swept into the area and neutralised the little RUF resistance they encountered.

EO mortar crews bombard rebel positions (photo: Jim Hooper)

Overlooking Gandorhun, our men on the hill heard sporadic firing as the SLA engaged RUF survivors. Many had understandably lost their will to fight and fled into the jungle. Fred and the SLA quickly overran the RUF's position and seized the area. More than 40 RUF were killed and many more wounded. Several rebels surrendered immediately. Others, trying to flee, ran into EO's stopper groups and were quickly killed.

When interrogated later, captured RUF prisoners said they believed our men could see in the dark and through the jungle canopies. Well, we could—we had night- vision equipment.

The RUF's killing spree in Werdu had been partly avenged and although it would not bring back the dead, it sent a message to the rebels to stay away from the villages and, even more importantly, not to harm the locals.

With the operation successfully accomplished, Captain Silla and his SLA infantry company were tasked to remain in the area to secure and dominate it. The Mi-17 that came in to extract Renier and his team off the hill diverted to Gandorhun to also pick up Fred.

Jim Hooper, meanwhile, had gone on a walkabout in the town to take photographs for his records, and was almost left behind. He was panic stricken when he was hauled aboard the helicopter as it was lifting out of the LZ. The subsequent debrief at the tactical HQ detailed the operational aspects of the mission, the lessons learnt, and the feedback from the men who had participated. Radio intercepts confirmed that the rebels had suffered heavy casualties.

They did not venture back into the area for some time.

Hooper's story on the attack of Gandorhun was later published in several magazines. His writing was as objective as could be and was well received by several military magazines and journals.

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Roelf and Renier began formulating plans to recruit and train a local militia to assist with gathering tactical intelligence. They would draw the recruits from the Kamajor[321] tribe who knew their way around the jungle better than anybody else. The Kamajor believed implicitly in the power of voodoo, showed absolute respect for their forests, and hated the RUF who they believed were guided by evil spirits. They were also fearless fighters.

EO and SLA troops waiting to be uplifted from a mountaintop LZ (photo: Jim Hooper)

In his book Operation Certain Death, Damien Lewis characterised the Kamajors as follows:

Beneath the shadowed jungle canopy with their ancestral spirits to guide them, the Kamajors had no equal. They could move as silently as a gentle breeze stirring the dank jungle air, melt in an instant into the cavernous shade of a forest giant, and remain as motionless as that tree for as long as it took for the enemy to pass. And then, armed only with a rusty, home-made shotgun or a machete, they would pounce from the rear with the ferocity of a forest leopard. While the RUF were terrified of EO's helicopter gunships [there was only one] these they could at least hear, see, and run from. By contrast the Kamajors were the terror of the unknown. The terror of bloodshot eyes in the forest shadows, of horrible stranglings beneath the bending trees, of a blade thrust deep between the ribs by the hand of a dark and powerful magic.

The Kamajor tribal leader, Chief Sam Hinga Norman, was a Sandhurst[322]-trained officer who had seen active service during World War II. He commanded the total loyalty and respect of the Kamajors and staunchly supported EO and the work the men were doing.

With a modicum of training and with Chief Norman's support, our men were soon able to deploy the Kamajors as a highly effective tactical intelligence-gathering unit. In time, special Hunter Force units of Kamajors were set up to locate RUF camps and bases deep in the jungle. This intelligence would be relayed to our men in Koidu and a helicopterborne strike force would attack the RUF position—unless the Kamajor had already done it on their own. Fred Marafono played a major role in several of these operations and was soon appointed as Chief Norman's personal bodyguard. After saving the chief's life during a rebel attack, he was also appointed an honorary chief of the Kamajor.

Joint EO/SLA fighting patrols continually combed the areas Roelf and Renier identified as still being vulnerable and unstable. During these patrols, the villagers were reassured that the rebels would be driven away and defeated, and where possible, they were also given medical and other support.

In Freetown, Bert and his staff continued to provide advice and guidance to the RSLMF and the government. Intelligence given to them came from the agent network Carl and his team had established and supplemented with signals intelligence from our own signallers.

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Ignoring what EO was actually doing in Sierra Leone, Military Intelligence continued its so-called intelligence-gathering operations against us.

Typical of an MI report during that time was the following agent report:

EO and a galvanised militia of Sierra Leone's conscript army looted and burnt their way through RUF territory, destroying bases and cutting supply lines wherever possible and even seizing for the government most of the diamond rich areas Sankoh coveted above all. It was too little, too late for Strasser.

EO men joined in the raping and murdering of innocent civilians. EO men are being paid in diamonds and continue to smuggle them to South Africa on Ibis Air aircraft. Eben Barlow receives a cut from all diamonds sold in South Africa.

Reports such as these were, as usual, fed to the NICOC and the South African government. Several such reports were also passed to foreign journalists who received 'confidential briefings' from officials at the DFA. It was clear that DFA officials and the South African media were engaged in creating perceptions to further vilify EO internationally.

As a result, EO was placed under increasing pressure from the international media. International political pressure was already being placed on the Angolan government to

end our engagement there. It was now also being placed on the Sierra Leonean government.

The US Department of State and the UN called for EO to be ejected from or to leave Sierra Leone and in time, the government of Sierra Leone would be blackmailed, threatened, or bullied into terminating our contract. We knew the RUF would recommence their terror campaign the moment we left—but obviously, this would suit foreign agendas and interests.

The Sierra Leonean government had now regained control over the diamond- mining areas. Ironically, we were being criticised for having focussed operations on the areas from where the rebels had produced the funds to continue their campaign of terror. Our logical military strategy had now apparently become a sinister one.

My continuing attempts to convince Bertie Jackson and his bosses in the South African Secret Service that this reporting was malicious, based on lies and fabrications, and driven by hidden agendas, made no difference. No one believed that civilians in Sierra Leone perceived our men as a force that was protecting their villages and defending their lives—or that they were openly friendly and helpful to our patrols in the areas our men were working in; maybe no one else cared about the locals, but at least they knew that we did.

During that time, we also received some good news; for months the Geo International Trading court case in which he had been found guilty and given a prison sentence of several years, had been hanging over Nico Palm's head. When his appeal was finally heard, the State's case crumbled and was thrown out. Nico was acquitted and the sword of Damocles was sheathed.

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Around that time, rumours started circulating that Executive Outcomes was— and had been—very active in the conflicts and genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. Several attempts to dispel these rumours were unsuccessful and I decided that the media should go ahead and publish their lies. I couldn't have been bothered as I had a lot more on my mind than countries where we weren't active. I did however know that elements within South Africa were covertly providing arms, ammunition, and training to the warring factions.

As I continually visited the UK, I was routinely apprehended and interrogated at Heathrow Airport. As time progressed, the harassment at Heathrow got worse—and I realised that I was being treated like a criminal who had skipped bail.

I was eventually compelled to write an angry letter to the British High Commissioner in Pretoria complaining about the persecution I was being subjected to. I pointed out that I was not a terrorist, nor had I been charged or convicted of any criminal offence, so I found the actions of HM Immigration officers unacceptable. I knew the harassment had been triggered by disinformation provided by Military Intelligence's liaison with MI6, but I still demanded an explanation.

The High Commissioner's office promptly responded and issued me with a multiple entry visa on 31 August 1995. They also apologised for the inconvenience I had experienced and assured me that the new visa would prevent any such problems in the

future. The silly thing was that as a Commonwealth and South African citizen, I didn't need a visa to enter the UK,[323] but the one they gave me certainly prevented further harassment at Heathrow.

I also realised that our enemies and detractors were gaining the upper hand.

War correspondent Jim Hooper accompanied an EO attack force against the RUF (Photo Jim Hooper)

30:
A Change of Government in Sierra Leone

By late August 1995, EO was firmly in control of the situation in Sierra Leone. Aggressive operations against the rebels were paying dividends and the locals, who had increasingly come forward with intelligence on rebel deployments, movements, and activities, were beginning to believe that the terror was coming to an end.

The EO command element was pleased with the ongoing operations in the interior of Sierra Leone—especially in the Eastern Province's diamond-rich Kono District—and started focussing their attention elsewhere. Apart from fulfilling the role of overall EO commander, Bert Sachse had increasingly played a role as a diplomatic and political advisor to the NPRC government.

An EO/SLA helipad at Bo, south of Freetown. A convoy escort vehicle is about to move out (photo: unknown)

Several EO men were redeployed as the situation in the Eastern Province improved, but Roelf van Heerden was left there to control military operations particularly in and around Koidu and the Kono District. Bert correctly believed that Roelf was the perfect man for the area in which he was deployed; with time, he had become revered, and chiefs and villagers approached him for advice, help, and support, and even to settle disputes. With the little they had, Roelf and his men had been able to make huge contributions to the lives of the villagers.

A heliborne fire force of 40 EO men had been established at Fort Pega on the outskirts of Freetown under Renier Hugo's command. Renier's command element comprised Major Johnny Maas and Sergeant Major Piet Opperman. The fire force's tasks were to react to any call for support as well as conduct its own helicopter assaults and raids against RUF strongholds deep in the jungle. These targets were usually identified and plotted by signal intercepts and confirmed using aerial reconnaissance.

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Sometime in late August 1995, the NPRC asked Bert to investigate the situation around the Sierra Rutile[324] Mine near Bonthe,[325] a small coastal town approximately 300 kilometres south-east of Freetown. As a result of RUF activities in the area, the mine had been unable to operate for some time. The owners had approached the government about stabilising the situation with a view to assessing the damage inflicted by the rebels, carrying out the necessary repairs, and recommencing mining operations.

The US State Department later expressed its view on Sierra Rutile:

Sierra Leone has one of the world's largest deposits of rutile, a titanium[326] ore used as paint pigment and welding rod coatings. Sierra Rutile Limited, owned by a consortium of US and European investors, began commercial mining operations near Bonthe in early 1979. Sierra Rutile was then the largest non-petroleum US investment in West Africa. The export of 88 000 tons realized $75 million for the country in 1990. The company and the Government of Sierra Leone concluded a new agreement on the terms of the company's concession in Sierra Leone in 1990. Rutile and bauxite mining operations were suspended when rebels invaded the mining sites in 1995.

Sometime in September, an Mi-17 ferried Renier, Carl Dietz, Sam Little (a Sierra Rutile engineer) and a small EO team to the Sierra Rutile mine to conduct a reconnaissance and inspection. Although the RUF had caused large-scale devastation at the plant, there appeared to be no imminent rebel threat in the area. Little was convinced that with a joint EO/SLA team to protect the Sierra Rutile staff, it would be possible to resume operations once the damage had been repaired. This would give Strasser's government access to another valuable revenue-stream it had been denied. Once in operation, the mine would be able to call on Renier's fire force if threatened.

A mobile force (MF) under command of Niek du Toit (a highly respected Special Forces operator) with Cobus Claassens as his second-in-command was ordered to deploy, secure, and hold the Rutile Mine and provide protection to the mining teams and their engineers. The column was escorted by EO's newly acquired Cessna 337 piloted by Mark Von Zorgenvrei.

Niek du Toit commanded the EO force at Sierra Rutile (photo: Al Jazeera)

On arrival they immediately prepared defensive positions and Niek sent aggressive fighting and security patrols out to secure the area, meet the locals, and gather terrain intelligence. The local villagers were prepared to provide crucial intelligence relating to the RUF's activities in the area—in turn, the EO force offered to protect them from RUF retribution.

Apart from a few minor contacts with the RUF, the area around Sierra Rutile was soon stabilised, and the mining engineers were able to complete their damage- assessment inspections in relative peace. Indeed, the greatest problem facing the men was the SLA troops who tried to loot whatever they could lay their hands on.

With Freetown and the diamond and rutile mining areas back under government control, the fight could now aggressively be taken to the RUF.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) chose to present matters in a different light. In a scathing, undated report, Executive Outcomes was accused of having performed 'all kinds of illegal acts' in its pursuit of the RUF. The report also stated, as fact, that 'EO soldiers fired on civilians from helicopters and used fuel-air explosives to burn entire forest areas and everyone in them'.

I wondered if UNESCO had been in a different Sierra Leone from the one our men were operating in. The locals would never have extended their support—let alone given us intelligence on the RUF—if we had overflown their villages and fired on them from helicopters—or from anywhere. If we were such out of control killers, why were they coming to our men in ever-increasing numbers for protection, help, and medical treatment? I suspected that UNESCO had a very different agenda in Sierra Leone—an agenda that had nothing to do with peace or stability. I also recalled Johann Smith telling me that Sean Cleary was able to exploit his friends at the UN and make them word reports in a manner that would cast EO in a negative light and force its closure.

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Reconnaissance missions flown by Mark Von Zorgenvrei in the Cessna 337 (often accompanied by Renier as an observer) and intelligence provided by the villagers or the Kamajors were used to pinpoint numerous RUF camps and bases which were then attacked and destroyed.

At times, the Nigerian troops from the ECOMOG peacekeeping force assisted in joint operations, mainly with artillery fire support or close air support using their Alpha jets. Despite the problems our pilots had encountered in Nigeria while shuttling the helicopters to Sierra Leone, there was never a problem between the Nigerian forces in Sierra Leone and EO.

In a typical operation, Renier and Zorgs would scan the jungle from the Cessna spotter aircraft, looking for tell-tale signs of RUF activity. If camps or bases were spotted, their locations would be plotted. Intelligence gathering operations would then commence to confirm that the positions were occupied by rebels and a decision would be made about

whether to call in an artillery strike or conduct an air assault on the RUF position. Sometimes the Nigerians were asked to conduct long-range bombardments using their BM-21s—a Russian-made, vehicle-mounted, multiple- rocket launching system better known as the 'Stalin Organ', in which case, the fire control would be coordinated by Renier acting as an airborne FOO. Renier spent so much time flying as an FOO that over time, the pilots started handing aircraft controls over to him.

During that time, the RUF, apart from having suffered massive casualties, had completely lost the initiative in the field, along with much of their desire to fight. Captured RUF prisoners spoke of low morale and were skittish about attacking our men 'by accident'. Isolated incidents (ambushes of civilian vehicles, the torching of villages and torturing of villagers, and the abduction of children) were ongoing, but our responses were always swift. Bert wanted the RUF to know that whatever they did, we would come after them—and that they had nowhere to hide.

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Towards mid or late September 1995, a group of mostly foreign journalists approached me. They said they wanted to cover the 'real story' of EO in Sierra Leone, and asked if they could visit the country and see 'first-hand' what we were really doing. I discussed the matter with Nico and we agreed that, given the negative media EO was receiving in South Africa, it was possible that such a visit would finally give an objective view of EO's work. I was content to accept criticism from the media, just not lies and disinformation.

The journalists asked if they could travel to Sierra Leone on one of our charter aircraft as, according to them, their budgets didn't allow for independent foreign travel to West Africa. I agreed to their request with some reluctance, thinking it strange that the powerful networks they claimed to represent couldn't afford to send them to places where high-value news was being made. I sent Bert a note and asked him to coordinate the visit. He never received it.

The journalists arrived in Sierra Leone on 27 September 1995. Despite the lapse in our communications, matters were quickly rectified. Andy Brown met them and gave them an initial briefing on the RUF, the SLA, and the current security status. He and Bert also quickly arranged several interviews for them.

One of the journalists—most probably believing that his 'scoop' lay elsewhere—decided to mount his own intelligence-gathering operation designed to portray the NPRC, the RSLMF, the SLA, and EO as the real cause of the conflict in Sierra Leone. His secret agenda was quickly exposed by his amateurish approach to intelligence gathering and it created enormous problems. The entire group was promptly arrested and their equipment confiscated, and the interviews that had been arranged were immediately cancelled by Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. This placed EO in a very precarious situation as they had arrived in Sierra Leone, ostensibly to provide objective media coverage of the situation—and EO had coordinated their interviews.

Unbeknown to the journalists, the SLA wanted to have all of them summarily executed. On hearing about their pending fate, Bert and Andy intervened and an enormous verbal

slinging match between Bert and Maada Bio ensued. Maada Bio was adamant: the journalists were to be tried and executed for espionage. Bert and Andy eventually managed to calm the situation and arrange their release. They were ordered to leave the country forthwith.

Andy sent me an urgent signal saying the reporters were demanding we pay their airfares back to South Africa because they were 'our guests'. I was taken aback by their arrogance and sent Andy a blunt message back: 'Tell them to pay their own fucking airfares'.

The fall-out did not favour us. They quickly blamed EO for their misfortunes and targeted us, despite the fact that we had tried to assist them and even saved them from execution.

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At around this time, Foday Sankoh's wife was arrested while trying to sell diamonds illegally. Her subsequent interrogation provided detailed intelligence on the locations and lay-outs of RUF bases and their activities. She also provided a comprehensive database of all key RUF players, down to individual murderers, torturers, and rapists, and EO was finally able to draw up a complete 'order of battle' for the RUF—something that had till then been lacking.

Armed with this information, EO's air assets went into overdrive and reconnaissance flights confirmed Mamma Sankoh's information about RUF base locations with pinpoint accuracy. With RUF deployments identified, Bert, his staff, and the RSLMF HQ rapidly developed operational plans. Permission to attack was hastily granted and EO's airmobile fire force began locating and destroying the remaining RUF bases, one by one.

Intelligence gained from the locals, captured RUF members, the Kamajors, signals intelligence, and aerial reconnaissance confirmed that a large RUF group was concentrated in the Kangari Hills[327] on the road to Koidu. The rebels were conducting hit-and-run actions and vehicle ambushes along the route and then hastily withdrawing into the hills where they believed they would be safe.

We would soon change that perception.

By the end of November, the entire Kailahun district (bordering Guinea and Liberia and traditionally considered a safe haven by the RUF) had been liberated by means of several rapid and aggressive air assaults. The rebels fled into the neighbouring countries where they tried to regroup and, with Sankoh's encouragement, continue their terror campaign.

The RUF base in the Makondu District was destroyed by a heliborne assault which laid Sankoh's threat about overrunning Freetown by Christmas bare as just another of his drug induced pipe-dreams.

At night, the Mi-17s and the Cessna 337 overflew designated search areas in a way that made it appear they were simply flying resupply missions to Koidu. Meanwhile, our men on board scanned the dark jungle with their night vision goggles, locating the white heat sources of the enemy's jungle campfires.

Their perseverance eventually paid off: They located the RUF's main deep-jungle base and fixed its position by GPS (Global Positioning System).

EO helicopter pilot Charlie Tait, Renier Hugo, and a pilot discuss a pending reconnaissance mission to locate RUF base camps (photo: unknown)

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The planning phase of the operation began. In broad operational terms, the intention was to use 70 EO men (drawn from the fire force and the contingents at Sierra Rutile and Koidu) supported by SLA infantry units and elements of the Nigerian artillery and Air Force. Our Mi-17s would be piloted by our own crews while the Mi-24 would be flown by Russian pilots who would communicate with our men on the ground through an interpreter. For some reason, the RSLMF's high command had decided that our pilots would no longer fly the Mi-24 on strike missions or in support of EO/SL ground forces. We very reluctantly accepted this change.

By early January 1996, the plan had been finalised, and marrying-up drills and final rehearsals had been successfully completed. It was time to visit the Kangari Hills.

The men were moved into their jump-off positions and the SLA units were deployed as stopper and cut-off groups. If required, they would be called in to reinforce the ground assault teams. The Nigerian BM-21s were deployed and their tubes laid. At Lungi, two Nigerian Alpha jets armed with rockets and bombs were placed on standby to await their strike orders.

When H-hour arrived, the Nigerians initiated the attack with a long-range rocket bombardment with their BM-21s. Renier, circling the strike area in the Cessna, made adjustments to their strike and shortly afterwards, talked in the Alpha jets. These swooped over the target and released their bombs. Watching from above, Renier was perplexed to see that, while the bombs seemed to be on target, none of them exploded. The BM-21 strike was on target, however, and the RUF were unable to defend themselves from the chaos created by the incoming rockets.

As the BM-21 strike lifted, the Mi-24 came in over the target area, but the Russian pilots claimed not to be able to see the target—this despite the fact that smoke from the artillery strike was still hanging over the area. Communicating through their on-board

interpreter, our men could only assume that the Russians were scared—or that someone had paid them not to deliver an accurate air strike.

In the Cessna, Renier eventually guided the reluctant Russians onto the target by telling them to follow him in and strike the jungle area directly beneath the Cessna as soon as it pulled out. The Russians were left with no choice but to comply with the Cessna's instructions. With its ordnance offloaded, the Mi-24 promptly turned around and scuttled back to Lungi Airport at Freetown.

One man would later tell me:

> Those Russian pilots were really crap. Either they were scared or someone had asked them—possibly paid them—to refrain from committing the Mi-24 to battle. They were also very resentful towards our pilots who had been flying the Mi-24 on strike missions. Our guys continually flew in to meet the RUF despite heavy ground fire, and they scored mission success after mission success with the Mi-24. The Russians were reluctant to take chances; they also weren't concerned when our men called for or needed close air support. If our pilots had flown the Mi-24 that day, it would have been a totally different situation for the RUF but for some political reason, we were no longer allowed to. It was very frustrating.

Our Mi-17s, laden with the assault teams under command of Johnny Maas, followed the Mi-24 into the strike area. Once on the ground, the teams formed up and began to sweep towards the RUF positions, quickly neutralising any incoming rebel fire.

The teams soon located the bombs that had been dropped by the Alpha jets. The nose fuses hadn't been armed, which explained why they hadn't exploded. This had either been done deliberately or there was a massive lack of professionalism.

With last light approaching, Johnny decided to halt the sweep and moved his men to a temporary base for the night.

A group of rebels, hyped-up on drugs and alcohol, later approached the temporary base and tried to intimidate and scare the men off by shouting, "We will kill you South Africans!" and "Tomorrow you die!"

The men answered the taunts with a hail of bullets and the rebels rapidly withdrew into the jungle.

As dawn broke, Johnny's men resumed their sweep and, coming under accurate fire, the RUF resistance collapsed. The mortars were quickly redeployed, and with Renier once more acting as an airborne FOO, the rebels were pounded as they fled. The SLA, lying in wait in their stopper-group positions, cut down several RUF members as they tried to escape. The enemy base in the Kangari Hills was soon under our control.

As Charlie Tait's Mi-17 came into the LZ to uplift the assault teams, a lone RUF survivor fired an RPG-7 anti-tank rocket at one of our men, Tshisukila Tukayula De Abreu[328]—affectionately known as 'TT'—who was sitting under a tree. TT was a man who had shown his experience and leadership in 32 Battalion in the 1980s. Fortunately for

TT, the rebel's aim wasn't too good but the rocket's stabilising fins sliced off a section of his webbing[329] and tore a deep gash in his shoulder.

Johnny quickly informed Renier that they had drawn RPG-7 fire and had a casualty. Charlie was told to orbit the LZ until the area had been cleared. Several men found the rebel who had fired the rocket and he was quickly killed. Speculative fire was also poured into the bush to secure the LZ and discourage any RUF members who might have stayed behind.

The assault teams and the SLA were uplifted and flown back to Lungi for debriefing. TT was casevaced to hospital where he made a good recovery. He was soon back and raring to get back into action.

Bert was pleased with the results of the combined forces' attack and the news was quickly passed on to Strasser and his senior officers, who were equally satisfied. I was more than just 'pleased'—I was ecstatic when I heard the news.

By then, however, Strasser was starting to lose control over everything he was supposed to govern.

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On 8 January 1996 I received a letter from journalist Khareen Pech who wrote:

The media attention has often produced biased, badly researched, and subjective reports. Most recently, Le Figaro, a right-wing paper in France, reported that Executive Outcomes is the military wing of the De Beers Corporation, a claim that they could not prove and which they reported on the basis of hearsay.

Like so many other journalists who had approached us, Pech asked for a free trip to Freetown, including accommodation, food, protection, and a flight back to South Africa. And like so many others had done, while we were busy protecting and feeding her, she got busy discrediting us.

In spite of our disdain for the journalists we had come up against thus far, we decided to sponsor Pech. I made the arrangements in the misguided belief that maybe I could be wrong as far as one journalist was concerned.

Pech[330] used the visit to proclaim herself a self-styled expert on Executive Outcomes. She too would produce 'biased, badly researched, and subjective reports'. Apparently, she also freely offered her charms to several of the men she spoke to. When I heard the stories about Pech's nightly extra-mural activities, I had to laugh.

She spiced her articles with creative journalism, and at a later stage, even wrote that I had changed my name for reasons I am still unsure of. Perhaps she thought this outlandish lie would make her story more impressive.

It was interesting to note that not one of the journalists who begged for seats on our aircraft ever had the decency or good manners to write us a note of thanks. Manners appeared not to be their strong point.

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Around mid-January 1996, and following the destruction of the RUF base at Kangari Hills, some South African government officials got very outspoken in their criticism of EO. Rusty Evans, the Foreign Affairs Director General, launched a vicious attack on us, labelling us a 'dangerous criminal and destructive force in Africa'. He and others were still searching for a way to end our contract in Angola, and doing everything in their power to persuade South Africa's partners in the OAU[331] to take a position against EO and 'other such firms'. Many African governments saw through Evans' duplicity and promptly ignored him and his DFA[332]—as did some Far Eastern governments.

Rusty Evans had publicly called us 'criminals' despite numerous police investigations into both my own and the company's activities having proved otherwise.

I called Evans a liar and challenged him to substantiate his claim on radio and television. I requested that he, Sean Cleary, and the National Party's Minister Pik Botha join me for a debate to be broadcast live to ensure that nothing could be edited out to protect them. They all refused my offer knowing full well that I would expose them for what they were—liars hiding behind government contracts and titles, sponsored by taxpayers' money. It was a recapitulation of our confrontation seventeen months previously.

The media showed no interest in what I or anyone from the company had to say. It seemed they preferred to believe the DFA's distortions. This was probably because the media didn't believe that senior government officials and their lackeys would dare lie so flagrantly. Of course, several were also being paid to propagate and maintain the disinformation campaign against EO.

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Still in mid-January, and following the devastating attack on their hide-out in Kangari Hills, the RUF secretly made overtures for a cease-fire. They claimed they were willing to drop all demands and enter into negotiations with the NPRC. This climate of relative stability eventually led to elections in February 1996.

Strasser had started formulating plans to hand over power to a democratically elected government sometime between December 1995 and January 1996.

On 17 January 1996, Captain Valentine Esegragbo Melvine Strasser was removed from power by a quiet coup led by Maada Bio, an officer increasingly at odds with Strasser and also strongly in favour of a return to democracy in Sierra Leone.

Our men (having been warned by the chief of the SLA that they would soon be seeing some strange events at the RSLMF HQ and that any intervention from EO would be resisted) watched as heavily-armed SLA troops surrounded Strasser's office, led him out in handcuffs, and placed him in a waiting helicopter which flew him off to exile in Guinea.[333]

Speaking on national radio later that day, the Army's Director of Defence Information, Lieutenant Colonel Karifa Kargbo, accused Strasser of having wanted to cling to power.

He said:

Captain Strasser has been removed from office and has safely left these shores due to his blatant attempts to implement legislation intended to be harmful to the democratic process. The electoral process has been suspended to allow discussions with all political parties. Any soldiers except those under special military command are instructed to keep off the streets.

Lafras and I discussed how this would impact on our contract with the NPRC and Strasser. I fully expected an international outcry over Strasser's removal from office and—most probably—for Executive Outcomes to be blamed.

"I don't think it will have much effect," said Lafras, "Maada Bio still wants the RUF to enter into negotiations and call for a cease-fire. Our guys are okay; they're still hunting the RUF. Whoever is chosen as president will probably be forced to get rid of us eventually but our contract is virtually complete…we've brought most of the problem areas under control. Let's just hope they don't ask us to leave too soon and then end up having to call us back to resolve new problems."

I did not share Lafras' optimism about our contract being safe. I suspected, since most of the country was now under government control, that the UN would want to rush in and act as though they had achieved the peace. I also suspected that Maada Bio's NPRC (or whoever ultimately won an election in Sierra Leone) would be forced to terminate our contract, and our departure would open the door to numerous European and US companies who would replace us with the consent and financing of their governments. This would also encourage the RUF to regroup and continue their blood-letting actions.

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By then several South African churches and religious organisations were contacting us and asking us to arrange visits to Sierra Leone for them. We willingly did this and flew numerous groups to Freetown so that they could minister to the locals.

On 1 February 1996, D L Adams of the Jubilee Community Church wrote a letter of thanks to Thys Pelser saying:

I want to thank you very much indeed for your kind services in facilitating our trip to ... Freetown on 17 January and back on 25 January.

We are well aware that our trip to Sierra Leone would not have been possible without your help, and I want to assure you that it led to very fruitful contacts and friendships being built up between ourselves here in Cape Town and a whole group of pastors from some of the indigenous churches of Sierra Leone. From funds raised within some of the local churches here in the Western Cape we were also able to purchase rice in Freetown for some of the many thousands of displaced people who have flocked into the city from the provinces. So our visit was a great success and we appreciate your part in it.

It was interesting to see that there was an amazing amount of good feeling towards South Africa in Freetown, and people from all over expressed their appreciation for the

help being received on the security level.

Once again, thank you for your help. You have done us a great service. Yours sincerely,

DL Adams

Adams' letter regarding the general feeling towards South Africans starkly contradicted the media's claims about us burning down forests, raping and killing the locals, and looting homes. It was also the only letter of thanks we ever received from a visiting group.

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The parliamentary election in Sierra Leone was planned for 26 February 1996 and our men were placed on standby to support the election process and prevent any RUF interference. EO was also asked to coordinate the movement of ballot boxes from outlying areas to Freetown.

The official election slogan was 'The future is in your hands' and the people of Sierra Leone took to the polls in astonishing numbers. Disillusioned by the RUF who inspired terror, and the NPRC who engendered distrust, the people saw the elections as an opportunity to bring about permanent change in their lives.

In a second round of the election on 15 March, the people chose Tejan Ahmed Kabbah[334] as their new president.

Representing the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), President-elect Kabbah

quickly tried to make his mark on the country. Certain that the RUF's Corporal Foday Sankoh would be reasonable in his demands and agree on a lasting peace, he invited Sankoh to the negotiating table.

On 21 March, a Red Cross helicopter picked Sankoh and sixteen of his aides up from their headquarters in eastern Sierra Leone. Accompanying them was the

Ivory Coast Foreign Minister, Amara Essy, who was there as a guarantor of Sankoh's safety. They were flown to Guinea where they transferred to two awaiting aircraft for the flight to Ivory Coast. Sankoh initially objected strongly to travelling through Guinea,[335] because that country had contributed troops to the ECOMOG forces and had possibly fought his RUF alongside the SLA. Despite all misgivings, Sankoh agreed to a ceasefire, but it was also agreed that any violation would be met with massive retaliation.

That same day, Children Associated with War[336] (CAW) presented EO with a certificate of appreciation for the assistance our men had given to child combatants and other young victims. Where they were able, the men had disarmed child soldiers, fed them, given them medical treatment, and later evacuated them to places of safety. The certificate was signed by Dr Edward Nahim, chairman of the board of directors, and by Father Michael Hickey, the CAW's programme manager in Sierra Leone.

A typical Sierra Leonean child soldier (photo: Martin Lueders)

We were very proud of this award but journalists we showed it to considered it either to be a fake or a forgery. I was at a loss for words.

British correspondent Jeremy Harding grudgingly wrote:

... with Dr Edward Nahim, a consultant psychologist and lecturer supervising a rehabilitation project for former under age combatants in rebel militias, government forces, and semi-autonomous units. There was room for roughly a hundred young people on the property taken over from the Government Children Associated with War—part of a sprawling, ill-appointed juvenile reform centre at the end of a dirt track some distance from the main road.

Nahim and his colleagues were stretched because Eeben Barlow's men were referring youngsters from the areas they'd secured up country. It was the first tangible evidence of EO activity a visitor to Sierra Leone was likely to encounter and it did the company credit.

On 24 March, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service reported that twelve people had been killed near Bo when three villages were attacked, either by the RUF or by renegade soldiers. It was apparent that the RUF's Sankoh was using negotiations as a stalling tactic in order to re-arm and redeploy his rebels and continue his campaign of terror—just as UNITA's Savimbi had done before him. President-elect Kabbah had yet to learn that terrorists cannot be negotiated with.

On 29 March, Brigadier Maada Bio[337] formally handed power over to incoming President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Freetown erupted in celebration, and the streets were swamped with happy people, clapping, singing and dancing.

Ahmed Tejan Kabbah became president of Sierra Leone in 1996 (photo: ThisIsSierraLeone.com)

Meanwhile, Bert Sachse and his men, in partnership with the Kamajors, and at times with SLA and ECOMOG forces, continued their locate-and-annihilate missions in the interior and continued to do battle with the RUF. Intelligence leaks frequently occurred when operations were conducted in cooperation with the SLA and it appeared the RUF were being given prior warning of attacks. This led to understandable resentment by our men who became convinced that many of the SLA wanted to keep the conflict going.

Bert and his team were also approached to provide intelligence assessments to several foreign embassies, in particular the British High Commission. Through intelligence gained from base assaults, captured rebel prisoners, reconnaissance patrols, aerial reconnaissance, and signals intelligence, they were well positioned to provide detailed intelligence briefings of what the RUF was up to and what its future intentions were likely to be.

The intelligence was provided weekly along with briefings to President Kabbah and his advisors. Sometimes commanders of the ECOMOG forces were included. Kabbah also requested that EO conduct a personal security assessment to ensure his own safety and that of his family.

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Much to Kabbah's disappointment, Sankoh proved to be far less reasonable than he had hoped.

The RUF continued to violate the shaky ceasefire while escalating demands for negotiations.

Carl Dietz's intelligence operations had by then established that Sankoh's main base and HQ was located somewhere between Kenema and Bo, towns located to the south-east

of Freetown, straddling the Eastern and Southern Provinces, and conveniently close to the Liberian border. Discussing this intelligence with Bert, Carl said he believed a massive assault on this last major stronghold would finally break the back of the RUF, and force Sankoh into meaningful dialogue with the new government.

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Bert and his staff began developing a large-scale operational plan to attack and annihilate the RUF's remaining stronghold. However, Kabbah, ever the diplomat and still believing he could negotiate with Sankoh, overruled Bert's plan and decided against such an attack. This was a great disappointment to the men as that assault could have annihilated the RUF once and for all.

By early April, Kabbah was coming under major international pressure to terminate the Executive Outcomes contract and force EO to leave Sierra Leone. Arguing that Executive Outcomes was too expensive to maintain, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) also threatened to withhold all foreign loans as long as EO remained.

The UN agreed with that assessment. It did not want Executive Outcomes to be given any credit for the success the company had achieved and the thousands of lives it had saved. Instead, it wanted to be seen as the organisation that had brought peace to Sierra Leone.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Kabbah asked Lafras and Branch Energy's Michael Grunberg[338] to meet him so that he could explain his predicament. After getting Lafras to agree that the company would be paid month-to-month, Kabbah also brought up the still-poor economy and the lack of financing, and asked us to reduce our costs. Lafras also agreed to this, knowing that we could not, from an operational point of view, afford to extract any of our men from Sierra Leone. Doing so would leave a vacuum of power that the RUF would rapidly fill, negate the success EO had achieved, lead to unrest, and possibly precipitate the overthrow of Kabbah's government (for which we would surely be blamed).

I reluctantly agreed with him and it was decided that we would finance a percentage of our Sierra Leone contingent ourselves. Kabbah's government accepted this plan of action and undertook to reimburse the company at a later stage. Believing that the undertaking would be honoured, we kept our men at full strength.

Even with this compromise, we knew that our time in Sierra Leone would be cut short by international pressure and a shortage of budget, and became concerned about what might happen after we left.

Bert continually approached President Kabbah and advised him that the only way to ensure the survival of his new democracy was to attack and destroy Sankoh's last stronghold. If he didn't, his fears of being removed from power by a coalition of the SLA and the RUF would become reality.

Kabbah finally and reluctantly agreed.

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Around this time, I was phoned by Anthony McCall-Judson, a senior partner in the UK-based international consulting governmental and public affairs company, McCall-Judson Associates. He asked me to meet him urgently on my next visit to London.

I went to see him at his offices a few days later and he introduced me to a Colonel Njia.

"Colonel Njia represents Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara,[339] deposed president of The Gambia.[340] Sir Dawda would like to know if you would be willing to return him to power. He was removed from office by a military coup. I am merely acting as his broker along with Colonel Njia. I can assure you that the UN is also very keen to see him back in power," Anthony told me.

The Gambia is a tiny strip of a country on the West African coastline surrounded by Senegalese territory. It is the smallest country in Africa with an area of just 11 300 square kilometres. Before the coup, it had also been one of the oldest multiparty democracies in Africa. Much of its economy was based on agriculture and substantial foreign tourism; it was especially popular with British tourists.

"Let's not waste each other's' time," I said. "If the UN is so keen to see the president restored to power, why don't they do it themselves?"

By that stage, the mere mention of the UN always raised a red flag in my mind. "The UN does not have the will, the ability, or even the mandate to restore deposed presidents," Colonel Njia responded. "Do you think your company would be capable of retaking the country on President Jawara's behalf?"

"I'm certain we could do it, but I'd need a letter or some other UN document authorising such an action."

"That shouldn't be a problem," Anthony assured me.

"How many men will you need and how will you go about it?" Njia asked.

I was somewhat surprised that Njia (an army colonel) expected an instant strategy for retaking The Gambia, and thought I could predict how many men would be required.

"I can hardly give you an answer on the spur of the moment. At a rough guess I reckon about 100 men could do the job. But first we would need to do some thorough background research on the country, run some intelligence there, and decide on the best way of approaching your problem. Effectively, you are asking us to run a counter-coup. Before even considering such an action, we will need intelligence on troop deployments, force levels, weapons, and so on. Only once we have determined what kind of force we'd be facing would we be able to determine the 'whats' and 'hows' required to conduct the task."

"We can provide soldiers still loyal to President Jawara," Njia offered.

Keen to reclaim his power, President Jawara despatched an officer still loyal to him to ask if we would conduct a counter-coup to reinstall him
(photo: Face2Face Africa)

"Thank you, no. We'll use our own men. We'll draw up a broad operational plan and present it to you along with the budget required to get the operation moving. In the meantime, you had better start working on getting that letter from the UN."

"No, you'll have to fund this operation with your own money. You will only be paid once you have put the president back into power," Njia declared.

I looked at him incredulously. I couldn't believe he expected us to conduct an operation to restore a fallen president to power and fund it ourselves as well. Where did he think we would find the money to procure the weapons and equipment we would require?

"Leave it to me. I'll see what I can do," Anthony said, trying to get the discussion back on an even keel.

"Good," I said, "But let me make myself clear. We are not in the business of toppling governments—let alone on credit. Let's just say that we have learnt the hard way to trust no one when it comes to such matters. Get the letter from the UN authorising the operation along with the finances to fund it."

With that, we parted company.

I remained in contact with Anthony but The Gambia was never mentioned again.

WFP convoys asked for, and got, prtoection from EO (Photo httpwww.sierra-leone.org)

31:
Leaving Sierra Leone

A state of semi-calm, occasionally broken by RUF activities, descended on Sierra Leone after the election. Our intelligence indicated that Sankoh was still maintaining a large strategic base in the Kenema area, but its location had to be pinpointed before any operation could be mounted.

The rebel leader had rejected President Kabbah's many attempts to get him to the negotiating table to secure a lasting peace, and our intelligence indicated that the RUF was gathering forces in the jungle around Kenema in preparation for a major assault into the interior and against Freetown.

Meanwhile, false allegations and rumours about us being heavily engaged in actions elsewhere in Africa continued to surface.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) later wrote:

> ... the South African government is fully aware of EO's role particularly in providing military services and training to CNDD [National Council for the Defence of Democracy] forces in Zaire.[341] Human Rights Watch has seen South African government cables confirming those authorities' possession of this information. The European Union's special representative to the Great Lakes region, Aldo Ajello,[342] told Human Rights Watch that in mid-1996 he had confirmed EO's training of Hutu rebel forces and discussed it with the South African government.

The entire HRW document had been attached to a covering letter stating, 'A copy of the Human Rights Watch report has been forwarded to the NICOC for their attention', and forwarded by the DFA to the office of the Secretary of Defence.

I wondered who had fabricated the cables apparently sent by the DFA regarding Executive Outcomes' involvement in training CNDD forces. Ajello's ridiculous claim about us training 'Hutu rebel forces' made it clear that he had been taken in by disinformation he had not taken the trouble to confirm. It was also possible that he was a paid disinformation agent—or just grossly stupid. However, the South African government's role in fuelling tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda—and in providing weapons and training—needed to remain hidden. EO was conveniently on hand to be blamed.

HRW further claimed that 'a European military observer' based in Bujumbura had told them he had information confirming EO's role in 'training Burundian Hutu rebels'. Another lie had now surfaced regarding EO's role in the Great Lakes area.

By then I had become nauseated by the disinformation being presented as intelligence. The so-called European military observer's inability to get his facts straight didn't surprise me. I had seen their false signal reports; we had intercepted them whilst in Angola. We had also witnessed their gross incompetence when it came to training and advising

African armies—indeed, they were setting African armies up to fail through ineffective training, equipment dumping, and bad political and security advice, knowing that this would enable them to maintain a foothold in those countries.

What did surprise me was that Human Rights Watch had made no effort to confirm this information with us—not only did we have a somewhat better idea of where we were and weren't, we also knew who was actually providing covert support to the Hutu and other rebel groups in several African countries.

HRW went on to falsely claim, in its document, that 'A number of EO's top officers' were under investigation by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission 'for punishable offences, including assassinations, during the apartheid era'. This information had obviously been fed to them as part of the continued disinformation campaign against me in particular.

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By mid-August 1996, I had also become sick and tired of Sean Cleary's constant underhanded attacks on Executive Outcomes: his numerous letters to Peter Gush of Anglo-American, the letters in which he had urged Mbeki to bring pressure to bear on us, his 'advice' to Savimbi, his apparent discussions with selected journalists and the UN, and his close liaison with Jakkie Cilliers of the ISS.

Johann Smith, Cleary's aide and confidant, had (on numerous occasions) told me that the latter had a close relationship with Fred Rindel who was supplying UNITA with large consignments of arms and ammunition in exchange for diamonds. Clearly was also, according to Smith, exploiting and manipulating his close connections within the DFA and Military Intelligence. His ultimate goal, according to Smith, was to force closure of EO and re-establish his own private military company.

I had to do something to stop him.

At around this time, Jeremy Harding wrote:

EO thrives on the absence of civility, consensus, law and order; its biggest operations so far have been in countries with valuable natural resources ... Its greatest friends are probably vulnerable civilians whose environment it has secured against armed conflict—displaced peasant farmers, piece workers, impoverished miners; people who are less concerned with the idea that their nation-state may have become a job-lot than they are with physical safety, food and livelihood, all of which EO has reinstated for tens of thousands of non- combatants in Africa.

It however appeared that someone was listening to what I had to say: On 4 August 1996 a damning article on Cleary was published in The Star. The article, written by the paper's Investigative Unit under the headline 'Anglo's man keeps tabs on top UNITA talks' was a revelation for all—including me.

Amongst other things, the lengthy report on Cleary stated:

Confidential details of talks between Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Angolan politicians have been reported to Anglo American by a paid political consultant who also represents Angola's rebel UNITA movement...

Mr Cleary has close ties with the United States government and the United Nations, and also works with South Africa's Military Intelligence (MI) agency... The unit also has copies of a letter, handwritten by UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi to Mr Cleary as well as a document in which Mr Cleary urges the US to change its position and to support a meeting between President Mandela and Dr. Savimbi... And in a letter to Mr Gush, he informs him: 'We have also encouraged Dimitri Titov, who writes the Secretary-General's reports on Angola to the Security Council, to word this report, in so far as he can, in such a way that those determined to reduce the US contribution to peacekeeping this year, are able to justify making an exception in this case.

According to the UNITA sources, Mr Cleary gets paid in the United Kingdom over R100 000 a month by Anglo American and has been 'well paid, by UNITA too.'

The report went on to detail how Cleary had leaked confidential discussions between senior South African government officials to Gush of Anglo American, and mentioned that he had described Savimbi as 'intellectually the most accessible' person he had come across. He had also praised Savimbi in a letter to Mbeki.

Suddenly Cleary's game had become very clear. He was using his local and international contacts to vilify Executive Outcomes and ensure the closure of the company so that he could create his own PMC.

I was ecstatic when I read the report. Apart from shedding light on Cleary's methodology and agenda, it also gave me a reason, finally, to confront him— especially as he had refused the television debate. I wanted to do it in writing to ensure that he could never alter my words for his own purposes—or deny what I had written to him.

Accordingly, on 27 August I wrote to him in person and copied the letter to a comprehensive list of diplomatic personnel. I sent it by mail, courier, and fax to ensure that he could never deny having received it.

EXECUTIVE
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Page 1 of the author's letter to Cleary. It had a lengthy distribution list added

It read as follows:

A recent newspaper article (which came to my attention mere days ago as a result of a prolonged absence from South Africa) in which was described the most interesting and varied political influences exerted by yourself in Africa, has subsequently resulted in a number of knowledgeable parties coming forward to enlighten us. I attach hereto a copy of the relevant article for your information. It was during these follow-up meetings that we at last came to understand the significant role played by yourself in shaping the perceptions and inevitably certain resultant policy decisions which shaped our future in certain African states and elsewhere.

It has now become apparent that your undoubtedly vast access to major role players on our continent and abroad enabled you to lobby with a considerable measure of success against our company's involvement in conflict resolution in particularly Angola and Sierra Leone, and in fact reached as far as the United Nations and Dimitri Titov in particular.

Coincidentally, we have now also been given access to correspondence of yours (similar to those extracted from the newspaper article) in which you impelled major powers to act against us 'without delay' to limit—and virtually annihilate our scope for business in these states and other countries around the world.

The vested interests which now appear to have been at play during your almost feverish anti-EO campaign, have at last become obvious and we cannot help but feel that it is a great pity that your uncalled for intervention caused our intentions in Africa to be so misunderstood. This unfortunately resulted in lost opportunities for speedier, infinitely more humane, and more permanent solutions to longrunning destabilising situations in relevant states. Another unfortunate consequence has been that this caused the horrible hypocrisy of EO's detractors and the truth about our company to remain undisclosed: whilst EO has a policy of doing business only with legitimate governments, its vocal opponents—including yourself—continue to do the bidding of anti-democratic and rebel forces such as UNITA.

Had the political strategy you gave so generously to Heads of State and others in these particular cases been free of bias and the brief to 'develop' the financial and other interests of those parties and companies, perhaps we could have been allowed the opportunity to prove conclusively that private military aid in certain meritorious situations might be the only hope for some states already ravaged by the vested interests of politicians and business conglomerates.

Instead, exceedingly damaging and misleading perceptions were entrenched in power circles to ensure to as large a degree as possible that the emerging power of a company without any political agenda would not be tolerated to grow on the continent.

Untold damage has been caused not only to our company but also to probably the last prospects, in certain states, for a peace brokered in the interest of the people who live in those places rather than in terms of the agendas of those for whom peace is expedient only to serve their financial ends.

By the time the results of all the 'behind-closed-doors' briefings on EO started paying off for you and your 'clients', the company had already been almost irretrievably discredited in the eyes of both the policy-makers and the media, so much so that we found few people willing to understand and support our endeavours for peace. Were we aware any earlier of the exhaustive number of interests you represent, and the quite remarkable coincidence that those parties who turned to you should have all felt threatened in one way or another by our entrance into the great African race, we may have been able to at least set in motion some counter-measures to deal with the now generally accepted perception of ourselves as 'mercenaries' who fuel wars for money.

While the exposure of your multiple agendas may have come a little too late for us, we are relieved that those who have had the dubious benefit of your political advice may now finally realise from whence it came.

We would like to make it known at this stage that we have come into possession of irrefutable proof that you did not baulk at misadvising, in particular, our own Deputy President to ensure that the interests of those in whose pay and service you are, were served in every possible way.

However, despite your valiant efforts to promote the expansionist politics of your business 'clients' in Africa, they may be more than a little taken aback when they realise just how unwelcome and distrusted they still are in many of these states—despite your copious assurances to them. Unfortunately, South Africa as a country has also suffered in

the process with many African states now looking on it as a likely ally of anti-democratic forces.

Sadly, your nefarious agenda against EO has resulted in the 'criminalisation' of men with first-hand experience of war in Africa and perhaps the only ones with compassion for the real victims and their suffering as a result of ongoing conflict. As proof of this statement I attach a copy of a certificate we received from Children Associated with War.

As a self-styled peace broker and a man who frequently boasts of his 'small efforts to bring peace' to, for instance, Angola, you have certainly, and deeply ironically, made some large efforts resulting in exactly the opposite.

Yours eternally enlightened, Eeben Barlow

I didn't expect Cleary to respond to my letter—and not surprisingly, he didn't.

At a meeting a few days later, Johann Smith gave me detailed feedback on Cleary's shocked and angry response, and his anguish about the chances of the media picking up where I had left off. Cleary's prime concern was the fact that the letter had also been sent to several embassies and foreign media groups.

"He's so fucking mad at you—but more worried," Smith told me.

I could present plenty of evidence showing that Executive Outcomes had been irreparably damaged by Cleary's actions and lies but I could not get a single reporter (or anybody else who mattered) to listen to me. Even the Press Ombudsman was remarkably reluctant to take the matter further.

I desperately wanted to expose him for what he was but for the moment, he seemed to have the upper hand. Several of the journalists who had written caustic articles about EO (no doubt using Cleary's input) told me that my story was not worthy of public interest. I was dumbfounded.

Nevertheless, I could not sit on my backside and bemoan my fate. There was work to do, regardless of how Cleary 'encouraged' Dimitri Titov to word reports.

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At around this time, failed British soldier-cum-journalist Michael Ashworth, wanting to conduct 'objective' research and write about the company, solicited funds from EO to finance a visit to South Africa.

I reluctantly advanced the money (which he undertook to refund) towards his trip—and while he was in South Africa, we provided him with free accommodation and unrestricted access to our company documentation.

On his return to the UK, Ashworth claimed that he couldn't find a newspaper interested in publishing his article. He also never made good on his promise to refund the money we had loaned him. Like many of the other journalists who had crossed our path, Ashworth did not know the meaning of the word 'honour'.

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Although the cease-fire was nominally still in place in Sierra Leone, the RUF continued attacking civilians and vehicles where they could, and tried to terrorise the people into supporting their cause—whatever that was. Those who did not react fast enough to the RUF's demands were promptly killed, usually after being viciously tortured. These transgressions continued throughout 1996. Sankoh had also increasingly insisted on EO leaving Sierra Leone, and the UN fully supported him in this demand.

Our men continued to conduct follow-up operations against the rebels but Kabbah had forbidden any pre-emptive actions. While RUF actions escalated, the president remained firmly committed to achieving a peaceful settlement, and vulnerable Sierra Leoneans paid a heavy price for his lack of determined political will.

On 3 September, Kabbah finally issued a warning to Sankoh: The government would no longer tolerate violations of the cease-fire and would not hesitate to react with its contingency plans if necessary. This warning followed a number of attacks in August during which dozens of civilians had been killed in villages and on the Freetown-Bo[343] Highway. Survivors put the blame on the RUF.

The aid agencies, however, insisted that the attacks could also have been the work of armed gangs. I had come to realise that several aid agencies viewed the conflicts in Africa as the goose that laid the proverbial golden egg. An end to a conflict or war would impact their very profitable businesses negatively, but Kabbah was finally adamant that the government would not compromise the security of its civil populace.

On 9 September an attempted coup against President Kabbah was foiled by senior officers acting on intelligence received from our teams. The four soldiers arrested had planned to assassinate the president as he was crossing a bridge on his way to work.

On 16 September a local Freetown newspaper ran an article:

The Sierra Leone government has approved a request by RUF leader Foday Sankoh to return to his base, where he will brief his followers on a proposed peace accord. According to a senior government official, "Sankoh has asked the government to give him three days in Sierra Leone so he can speak to his men in the country". Transportation will be arranged by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which flew Sankoh to the peace talks in March. According to ICRC representative Laurent Fellay, "The ICRC is willing to grant the government's request to fly Corporal Foday Sankoh into Sierra Leone, but the date has yet to be decided by the government and Sankoh himself." Although talks between the government and the RUF broke down two months ago over the RUF's demand that the government expel the South African mercenary group Executive Outcomes, the two sides have resumed contact, and government officials are optimistic that a comprehensive peace accord will be agreed to later this month or in October. Finance Minister Thaimu Bangura said Saturday that the RUF has dropped a key demand that the RUF be involved in drawing up the national budget. The government is anxious to demonstrate progress in the budget negotiations before a donors meeting in Geneva this week. 'International donor funding of the rehabilitation and reconstruction of

the country is predicated on the negotiations. News of this breakthrough will certainly encourage the donors to help,' Bangura said.

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On 20 September, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) issued a statement saying that due to attacks on its vehicles, it could no longer continue with its relief operations. These attacks had been increasing since mid-August in eastern and southern Sierra Leone and the WFP felt it could no longer endanger the lives of its workers.

The WFP now called on our men for help. As Cobus Claassens recalled:

The person organising the food convoys and in charge of WFP logistics had come to us begging for help, saying that people in Bo were dying of hunger.

We were going to Bo anyway so we took charge of his and our vehicles, threw out the trucks we thought couldn't make the trip, and deployed our men and vehicles throughout the length of the convoy.

We got there in a day and the food we took through ended up feeding both Bo and Kenema for a while. A BBC crew actually filmed the process but then suddenly everyone was up in arms about the WFP having used EO's resources to feed the starving. We considered this to be proof of mass hypocrisy.

We stayed in Bo for a few weeks and then headed back to BTC, escorting more convoys heading for home.

Al J Venter would subsequently write about the aid our men had given the WFP and others:

Claassens and his group learnt two lessons there. The first was that a well- organised convoy system with armed protection worked very well in primitive country, even with overgrown jungle that one finds along this stretch of coast. The second was the extent of the furore that the self-righteous can raise once they've launched a crusade: in this case to stop using any means at the disposal of NGOs to feed a population under siege. That hypocrisy still rankles among many EO operators.

***

On 26 September, a joint SLA-EO operation attacked the small base from which the RUF were launching their continual attacks on the Freetown-Bo road. Our men, who had been escorting WFP convoys and other vehicles along the road, wanted to put an end to the civilian loss of life. Warnings had been issued to the rebels on numerous occasions but they had failed to heed them. Ten rebels were killed in the assault and several were wounded and captured.

Early in October, our men were forced to intervene in a stand-off between the SLA and the Kamajors in the strategic town of Bo. The confrontation would most certainly have led

to bloodshed, which would have benefited nobody but the RUF and the other forces fuelling the conflict in Sierra Leone.

On 14 October, a group of 'rebel soldiers' surrendered in Potoru in the Pujehun District.[344] Unable to sustain themselves in the field and growing ever more fearful of our men, they had been left with two choices: die of hunger or surrender. According to a radio report, they were so malnourished that aid agencies made a special appeal to the government for emergency food supplies.

On 20 October, a raid carried out by a joint Kamajor-EO group released more than 500 hostages who had been forcibly held by the RUF near Blama. Blama was located near the Kambui Hills Forest Reserve to the west of Kenema.

Referring to the hostages, The WFP's spokesman, released a report in Rome:

> The people we saw looked like a group of living skeletons with bundles of rags on their heads. Men and women were reduced to skeletons, with some of them having to support themselves on sticks to walk. Young men and women, besides being very thin, had swollen feet and sores, having walked days to reach Blama. The children had bloated stomachs, scabies, and discoloured hair because of malnutrition.

Over the coming days, the WFP was almost overwhelmed by hundreds of sick and hungry people who had walked great distances in search of food and help. Many of these had been held by the RUF since 1991 and were still wearing the clothes they had been abducted in. Our men witnessed these scenes and described them as 'horrific'.

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On 31 October, The Star published a blistering attack on Executive Outcomes written by journalist Alistair Sparks. The article titled, 'How SA policy can help Sierra Leone', claimed that EO was the cause of all of the problems in Sierra Leone and concluded that we were financially draining the country.

I promptly wrote a reply to the editor of The Star:

> The article by your journalist Mr Alistair Sparks ('How SA policy can help Sierra Leone') in The Star of 31 October 1996, deserves at least some comment.
>
> Mr Sparks, having by his own admission spent nine months in Sierra Leone, is apparently desperately trying to create the image that he is an 'expert' on that country.
>
> Sadly though, if Mr Sparks were such an expert he would have acknowledged in his very first paragraph that the 'remarkable election' in Sierra Leone only took place because of Executive Outcomes (this relatively simple fact could easily have been confirmed had he spoken to the foreign embassies in Sierra Leone). Furthermore, Mr Sparks refers to Executive Outcomes (EO) as 'mercenaries'. Could he please report this immediately to the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and insist, as so many before him, that the SAPS investigate EO without delay. Mr Sparks then refers to

some of our employees as 'hit-squad men'. I believe that Mr Sparks has a duty to report this to the TRC with evidence to back-up his statement.

What Mr Sparks also neglected to mention was the fact that the South African government did not send a single representative to Sierra Leone to attend the inauguration of President Kabbah. This was apparently done on 'advice' from the Department of Foreign Affairs. This lack of support to a newly-elected African government did not go unnoticed in Africa.

Having studied Mr Sparks' article, it is only too apparent that he did not go to the trouble of speaking to the various aid agencies in Sierra Leone whom we support and assist on a day-to-day basis. Nor does it appear that he spoke to the Deputy Minister of Defence, the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Mining. Finally, Mr Sparks is indignant at the cost of EO to the Sierra Leone government, or is Mr Sparks possibly the covert Minister of Finance of Sierra Leone that he raises the issue?

We would appreciate it if Mr Sparks, as and when he writes on Sierra Leone in the future, conducts his research thoroughly and thus informs your readers, not misinforms them as is now the case.

Eeben Barlow

Chairman, Executive Outcomes

Needless to say, the letter was never published.

As H van Vuuren alleged in his book, Apartheid Grand Corruption: Assessing the scale of crimes of profit in South Africa from 1976 to 1994, this was the same Alistair Sparks who had travelled to Switzerland to make deposits into an unnumbered Swiss bank account for Dr Nico Diederichs, a former South African minister of finance and later a state president who was exposed for having accepted bribe money.

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Despite all his talk about wanting to achieve a peaceful settlement and his promises to continue negotiations, Sankoh ordered his rebels to continue their attacks, especially against civilians. He also increasingly turned to the international community to have Executive Outcomes removed from Sierra Leone. RUF training in Liberia continued unabated.

We were not taken in by Sankoh's deceptive words, and the brutality of the RUF's attacks increased in size and scope until the horrors his rebels unleashed went beyond the unspeakable.

Another victim of RUF atrocities the world chose to ignore (photo: Jim Hooper)

Kabbah finally accepted that Sankoh was using delaying tactics and agreed that EO should confirm and locate his RUF HQ and destroy it. Numerous reconnaissance sorties were flown in the Cessna, trying to locate the hideout hidden beneath the dense jungle canopy.

During the first week of November on a Sunday morning, the aerial reconnaissance finally located it. Its coordinates were plotted by GPS as quickly as possible so that the RUF would not be alarmed into thinking they had been spotted, and the aircraft returned to Lungi.

The RUF base was situated deep in the Kambui Hills[345] in the Kenema district— also known as Zagoda—in the south-east of Sierra Leone, and it was there that the RUF high command planned to make their final attack on Freetown or its last stand.

Terrain such as this gave the RUF a sense of security from SLA attacks (photo: unknown)

The attack plan was formulated and men were drawn from several locations around Sierra Leone to partake in the assault. They gathered in Kenema where the drills, briefings, orders, marrying-up drills, and rehearsals took place. Supporting the operation would be two companies of SLA infantry, a detachment of Kamajors, and an artillery

battery of three Nigerian 105mm howitzers. The EO teams were to infiltrate and surround the rebel base and act primarily as stopper groups.

Neels Britz, our senior artillery officer, would accompany the Nigerian artillery and relay the fire-control orders from the airborne FOO as their ground control officer.

By 15 November, our men had completed their infiltration and had surrounded the RUF base where they lay in wait for the rebels who would no doubt try to flee the area. The assault teams were also placed on standby, awaiting orders that would deposit them onto the identified LZs.

The attack commenced with a three-day intermittent artillery bombardment. Circling the area in the Cessna, Renier, again acting as an airborne FOO, called for the first 105mm shell to be fired into the RUF base. He needed a reference point to enable him to make accurate fire adjustments.

The first 105mm, intended to assist with targeting, did more than that.

It landed on a large sand model of Sierra Leone, killing the entire RUF high command who had been sitting around the model discussing the next phase of their terror campaign.

Noting the impact zone, the order was relayed to Neels to 'fire for effect' and the Nigerian artillery commenced its deadly bombardment.

For three long days, the rebels were pinned down by accurate artillery fire. Those trying to escape ran into our men in their stopper-group positions and were cut down if they didn't surrender.

Over the coming days, hundreds of RUF members were killed or taken prisoner. Many more demoralised and wounded rebels surrendered to the SLA forces in Kenema and Bo.

Mohamed Tarawalay, effectively Sankoh's second-in-command, was either killed or lost his desire to fight. His call-sign was never heard over the radio again.

Having lost his entire high command, Sankoh called for a complete end to hostilities. He indicated that he was now finally willing to enter into meaningful negotiations to secure a lasting peace—on condition EO leave Sierra Leone.

Kabbah accepted Sankoh's pleas.

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On 13 November 1996, Jane's Defence Weekly published another article by Talif Deen[346] from the UN HQ in New York. Deen made more erroneous statements about Executive Outcomes, apparently in order to excuse the UN's inability to do its job. Titled, 'Mercenaries capitalise on mineral resources', Deen falsely claimed:

Executive Outcomes sells its services 'mainly in exchange for concessions relating to mining and energy'. The Angolan government 'has a contract with EO to offer protection in return for a share in the profits from the exploitation of the country's natural resources'. EO was affiliated with Branch Energy, Heritage Oil and Gas, and GJW Government Relations.[347]

I surmised that Cleary's cosy relationship with some in the UN was behind this latest lie. The article was, however, based largely on the disinformation provided by the DFA and MI.

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On 26 November 1996, I was asked to address the South African chapter of the Young Presidents' Organisation (YPO) which was comprised of young, wealthy movers-andshakers in the South African business community. The request to address the YPO had come through Queane Joubert,[348] the wife of one of our men. The invitation had hardly reached my desk when controversy erupted. Some YPO members refused to be in the same room as me. But as the organiser told me: 'Stuff them. Those who are really interested in hearing what you are doing will be there.'

I was warmly welcomed by everyone who attended the function.

I gave an overview of Executive Outcomes, a run-down of where we were operating, and a review of the efforts to sustain our operation in Angola for the month of July 1995 only. This included:

- The movement of 486 passengers—exclusive of our own men—by air
- The transportation of 67 tonnes of food and other commodities to sustain our men
- The purchase of 150 000 litres of aviation fuel
- The use of more than 30 000 litres of fuel for vehicles
- More than 1 550 radio transmissions between Cabo Ledo, our main HQ in Angola, and our offices in Pretoria
- The fact that our medics had carried out a total of 67 medical consultations for our own men
- The emergency medical evacuation of five of our own members due to malaria
- The provision of over of 50 000 litres of water per day for the local population living near Rio Longa
- The medical treatment of more than 940 civilians in the Cabo Ledo area by our medical staff.

The briefing was well received by the YPO and I felt that at least I had shed some light on what the men in the company were really doing, but realistically, I could not expect a talk such as this to rectify our image after the on-going smear campaign that MI, the DFA, Cleary and their sources in the media had run against us.

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On 30 November 1996, the Abidjan Accord was signed by President Kabbah and Corporal Sankoh. One of the preconditions demanded by the RUF leadership was that the contract given to Executive Outcomes in 1995 by the Strasser-led junta should be terminated with immediate effect, and the company's withdrawal monitored by the UN. The UN and several European countries hurriedly agreed with Sankoh.

The deputy force commander of the UN's Angola Verification Mission, Brigadier General Yogseh Saksena, arrived in Sierra Leone on 22 December 1996. He was in command of a specially appointed 'United Nations Assessment Team'. Considering the fact that the UN's UNAVEM mission in Angola had not exactly proved itself to be a great success, I wondered what they would achieve with this visit. I considered the assessment exercise to be nothing more than a play for time by the UN—and an attempt to show that it was indeed trying to establish itself in the country. What is there to assess when a country is being ripped apart by war and people are being slaughtered or dying of hunger on a daily basis?

Saksena and his delegation spent about a week in consultations with President Kabbah and his government. They also held discussions with representatives of UN agencies, diplomatic representatives, and NGOs operating in Sierra Leone. After that they travelled to Abidjan to meet the Ivory Coast's Foreign Minister, Amara Essy, and Corporal Sankoh.

Sankoh revelled in the manner in which the UN feted him as a 'president-in- waiting'—despite him leading what was, at that time, arguably one of the most brutal and vicious terror organisations in Africa, if not in the world. I could only shake my head in utter disbelief.

On his insistence, the UN delegation promised to put pressure on President Kabbah to ensure the speedy withdrawal of Executive Outcomes.

The Report to the Secretary-General on Sierra Leone, dated 26 January 1997, stated in paragraph 7:

> The military provisions of the Accord call for the disarmament and demobilisation of RUF combatants; the downsizing and restructuring of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF); the withdrawal of the private security firm, Executive Outcomes; and steps to bring about the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country in a manner consistent with existing treaty obligations.

Enormous pressure from the international community, the UN, and the IMF eventually forced Kabbah to buckle and terminate our contract. He had been advised that the UN would replace EO with a UN peacekeeping force immediately after our withdrawal. This promised force of 700 men would cost the world body US$47 million but it would eventually morph into a force exceeding 17 000 men.

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Prior to our withdrawal from Sierra Leone, Bert and his staff briefed President Kabbah and several senior European diplomats on intelligence (gained from agents and signals intelligence) indicating that Sankoh was planning to baulk at the Abidjan Accord, and that an attempt would soon be made to unseat Kabbah. They argued that the president should retain a small EO reaction force to counter any such RUF plans. Unfortunately this briefing was seen as an attempt by EO to ensure that our contract remained in place.

It was my view that the country needed at least three years to achieve the necessary stability. As the UN had already proved itself unreliable and incompetent on numerous occasions, I didn't believe it would honour its own promises to President Kabbah. If the UN failed to deploy a force that had the interests of Sierra Leone at heart, it would ruin what we had achieved and possibly create an even more unstable situation. This would give the RUF time to recover and resume its campaign of terror and crime—something I was convinced the RUF was going to do.

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The media reacted to the news that we would be leaving Sierra Leone as though they had won a major battle against Executive Outcomes.

Once again, Branch Energy was dragged into their claims. Tired of the continual media allegations that the two entities were one and the same or front companies for one another, I wrote to Tony Buckingham:

I refer to the telephone discussion between Mr Grunberg and myself on 15 January 1997.

It has become very apparent that due to our long-standing friendship, a massive disinformation campaign has been initiated in order to create the perception that Branch Energy is an Executive Outcomes front company. I have every reason to believe that this campaign was initiated by the South African Military Intelligence Division (SAMID), and to substantiate my claim I attach hereto:

- A SAMID document in Afrikaans.
- A translation of the above document

The content and the implication of the attached SAMID 'Intelligence Report' clearly indicates the role of SAMID in abusing the state intelligence organs to further their disinformation campaign, not only against EO but also against Branch Energy.

Further to the above, I hold documentary evidence that Mr Sean Cleary, the managing director of Strategic Concepts (near Johannesburg) and the advisor to the Angolan rebel leader Dr Jonas Savimbi as well as to the SAMID, SA Dept of Foreign Affairs, and the Anglo American Corporation, further fuelled the disinformation campaign against Branch Energy. In his letters to some of his 'clients' Cleary clearly writes of Branch Energy as being an EO 'front'. Should you require copies of this documentation I shall gladly make them available to you.

I sincerely hope that Branch Energy will be able to use the SAMID documentation I hold in order to take the necessary action against SAMID.

Yours sincerely, Eeben Barlow

Our warnings to President Kabbah were, on advice of all and sundry, rejected and Executive Outcomes left Sierra Leone in late January 1997.

Despite everything the company had done for the country, President Kabbah's government dishonoured its promise and never paid the outstanding fees to us. I believed

that over time, they would get what they deserved for reneging on our payment.

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On the morning of 23 January 1997, I was a guest on the SABC television programme 'Good Morning, South Africa'. During this broadcast, I again stated that Rusty Evans of the DFA, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs Pik Botha, and Sean Cleary of Strategic Concepts were liars, pure and simple. I challenged them to a live television debate and invited them to substantiate their allegations against the company and myself. They refused. Nor did Evans, Botha, or Cleary lay a charge against me for having called them liars on national TV.

I had on numerous occasions personally invited Evans to accompany us to Angola and Sierra Leone to see first-hand what Executive Outcomes was doing. He had never responded to any of my invitations.

Military Intelligence had continued fabricating intelligence on both EO and myself. I showed so-called 'Top Secret' intelligence reports on the company to Dorianne Berry who was conducting the interview and the reports were beamed nation-wide. I challenged SAMID and the SANDF to charge me for having classified documents in my possession. They didn't as they realised they could not lay charges against me for exposing lies hidden under 'Top Secret' security classifications.

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On 23 May 1997, Kabbah was overthrown in a military coup—something EO had warned him was going to happen. Kabbah fled to Conakry in Guinea where he established a government-in-exile.

Around this time, Elizabeth Rubin, the previously mentioned contributing editor at Harper's Magazine and The Forward wrote:

Privately, some diplomats and Africa experts believe that one force—a mercenary army might be able to contain the rebels' killing sprees in Sierra Leone, because it has done so before. In 1995, rebels drew within 20 miles of Freetown, and the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and the international conflict resolution experts were all unable to help. In its desperation, the Government of Sierra Leone hired Executive Outcomes, a South African mercenary army founded by apartheid era South African soldiers but made up mainly of black African soldiers, including Namibians and Angolans.

The company was willing to do what the United Nations cannot: take sides, take casualties, deploy overwhelming force and fire pre-emptively. Executive Outcomes agreed to put down the rebels and restore law and order in return for $15 million and diamond mining concessions. Relying on about 200 soldiers and a helicopter gunship, it nearly succeeded: 300 000 refugees were able to return from squalid camps in neighbouring Guinea that were costing the international community $60 million a year. And within a year, the people of Sierra Leone voted in their first presidential election in 28 years.

‘Our people have died, lost their limbs, lost their eyes and their properties for these elections’, the Sierra Leonean Defence Minister said to me at the time. ‘If we employ a service to protect our hard-won democracy, why should it be viewed negatively?’

Apart from Rubin’s erroneous statement concerning our ‘diamond mining concessions’, she was correct in her summation that EO was willing to do what the UN could not.

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Executive Outcomes would later be considered partially responsible for the coup that forced Kabbah into exile—after we had left Sierra Leone. I knew the international community and the UN were desperately looking for someone to blame for their spectacular failure in Sierra Leone and we were the perfect scapegoat.

At a later date a senior member in the company wrote a five-page historical overview of our role in Sierra Leone, which is briefly summarised as follows:

Mobilisation: After a formal contract for the provision of military, advisory, and support services was signed in May 1995 between EO and the Government of Sierra Leone, under Presidency of Captain Valentine Strasser, mobilisation of EO’s Force commenced.

On 5 May 1995 the initial group of ± 50 men flew to Sierra Leone. This group did joint planning with the officers of the Army of Sierra Leone and also had to act as a reaction force in case of emergency.

The advance group was supported from EO’s Rear Ops HQ in South Africa. Gradually the force was expanded to the operational and training needs of the client and varied up to 250 men.

The support of the group went extremely well because of lessons learnt in previous deployments and was administered on a day-to-day basis.

Training: The training of the Army was one of the major functions of EO in servicing the contract and was done at BTC (training centre ± 30 km East of Freetown). The plan made provision for simultaneous unconventional training for the units and sub-units and also included weapons handling, signals, medical, jungle warfare, attacks, and leadership training.

At a later stage sub-units and units were restructured and trained for more specific types of operations.

Operational: The immediate threat to the government was the presence of the rebels (RUF) on the outskirts of the capital (Freetown). After a joint operational planning session it was decided to phase the entire operational plan:

Phase 1: Safeguard the outskirts of Freetown. Phase 2: Occupy key districts of Sierra Leone.

Phase 3: Attack operational and training bases and the RUF HQ.

With the benefit of only minimum equipment, which included a couple of Land Rovers and two BMP-2s, Phase 1 was executed within six weeks.

From July to approximately December 1995 many operational successes were achieved and military bases were set up at Kono and Rutile.

The company's constant armed presence in the towns since then has resulted in an influx of diggers, traders, buyers, and foreign investors.

Sporadic attacks followed on various bases of the RUF which resulted in Foday Sankoh (the rebel leader) going to the negotiating table.

With some satisfaction I realised that we had met most of the objectives we had set out to achieve. What I said—or didn't say—had no impact at all. Our words would not be considered newsworthy.

Sierra Leone had become another chapter in our history.

A typical RUF patrol through Freetown (Photo Reuters)

32:
Enter the United Nations

Following Executive Outcomes' departure from Sierra Leone, several of our men were offered contracts to remain there by other private security companies who had rushed in to establish themselves in the country. Many of these were falsely accused of being 'front companies' for Executive Outcomes. Some of the men—who had no hope of finding gainful employment in South Africa—joined a company called Life Guard while others opted for Tim Spicer's Sandline International Ltd.

Tim, who had been ostracised by the media after Sandline's involvement in Papua New Guinea,[349] had now found his way to West Africa.

Our intelligence predictions, scoffed at by the international community, had soon been realised when President Kabbah was ousted by a military coup, orchestrated by Major Johnny Koroma in May 1997. Our suspicions about the UN's ineptitude had also been confirmed; the peacekeeping force of 700 men that was supposed to have replaced EO's 250[350] men at a cost of more than US$47 million had never arrived— donor countries had balked at the cost. Without the promised protection, Kabbah fled into exile and Koroma set up his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) which was controlled by the Sierra Leone Army. Before long, the AFRC joined forces with the RUF and started their own reign of terror. Eventually they became known as the 'West Side Boys'.

Sierra Leone once more slid into anarchy and chaos and the world that had so loudly condemned us, silently and impotently watched innocents being murdered and mutilated.

On 3 November 1998 during a British House of Commons select committee hearing on Foreign Affairs, Peter Penfold, CMG, OBE, testified:

As I say, Executive Outcomes have been involved in Sierra Leone for a few years. A government like Sierra Leone wanted assistance from the international community, advice on a civilian war, and the assistance was not forthcoming from government. At one stage the rebels were within 50 kilometres of taking Freetown and there was no way that the international community were prepared to commit troops and equipment. I think the government at the time, the NPRC Government, felt almost impelled to have to tum to a company like this to get assistance otherwise they would be overwhelmed.

The International Crisis Group Africa Report, in their comments titled 'Sierra Leone: Time for a new military and political strategy' reported:

Throughout the 1990s, Sierra Leone has had only one period of relative peace, in 1995-1996. South African mercenaries from an organisation known as Executive Outcomes were hired by the NPRC in April 1995. With a force of less than 200, they drove the RUF away from Freetown, secured the diamond fields and many other areas, and enabled a peaceful democratic election to be held in 1996. This was won by Tejan Ahmed Kabbah, a

former UN official. Unwisely, Kabbah thought that Foday Sankoh could be persuaded to reasonable compromise. In one of several peace agreements ultimately broken by the RUF, Kabbah agreed that Executive Outcomes should leave. As a result, he was overthrown by a military coup and exiled in May 1997.

The Explore Company Guide reported:

Reportedly, EO was paid US$20 million a year during its 1995 to 1997 stint in Sierra Leone, and routed the RUF forces with a force of less than 300 mercenaries, allowing elections to take place. By contrast, the UN peacekeeping force sent to Sierra Leone after the Revolutionary United Front retook the capital of Freetown consisted of 18 000 soldiers at its height and cost upwards of a billion dollars yearly, while arguably failing to defuse the bloody war for another three years. In terms of effectiveness, the UN peacekeeping force allowed the RUF to retake the capital twice while committing atrocities in its wake, and also stood by helpless while a military coup led by Colonel Johnny Paul Koroma deposed the democratically elected Kabbah.

According to the UN's Special Representative to Sierra Leone, the UN peacekeeping mission officially cost more than US$500 million a year. The Explore Company Guide disputed that claim.

Executive Outcomes had charged the Sierra Leone government a total of US$33 million for the 21 months we had worked there—much of it still remains unpaid to this day.

Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins[351] later expressed his views on the period during which we had been in Sierra Leone:

Desperate for help, Strasser turned to the South African-based Executive Outcomes which had enjoyed significant success in Angola and could call on ex- members of the South African Defence Force and their considerable experience of such conflicts. Within a month of arriving, they had stopped the RUF in its tracks. EO built on these successes with further raids into the RUF heartland while conducting a hearts-and-minds operation among the local population. In particular they forged an alliance with the Kamajor, warrior hunters of the indigenous Mende tribe. The Kamajor, brought up in the jungle, were at one with the forest. Deeply immersed in the animist beliefs of the region and in black magic, they relied on wood spirits and magic charms to guide them and protect them from harm. Operating deep in the forests, they struck fear into the hearts of their sworn enemies, the RUF, who would often awake to find a sentry with his neck broken or discover that whole patrols had fallen silent quarry to these jungle predators.

As the threat from the RUF receded and confidence was restored, the UN dared to venture back into the country and arrange democratic elections. With the return of stability in March 1996, and perhaps forgetting how that stability was achieved, a number of governments brought pressure on the newly elected President Kabbah to terminate the EO contract and rid Sierra Leone of private military firms. He complied and the last elements

of Executive Outcomes had withdrawn by March 1997. Kabbah was overthrown and living in exile within three months.

The coup that ousted President Kabbah was widely condemned in international circles, but apart from empty words and expressions of indignation, nothing was done to rectify the situation. Tim Spicer's company, Sandline, was called on to restore Kabbah to power and several of the ex-EO men who had decided to remain in Sierra Leone were asked to assist in what effectively became a counter-coup.

Ambassador Johnnie Carson, the US Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of African Affairs, said in a speech on 11 June 1998:

Then on 25 May 1997, a group of junior military officers, who styled themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, (AFRC) overthrew the Kabbah Government. The AFRC suspended the constitution, banned political activity and public meetings, and invited the RUF to join their junta. The junta killed, tortured, and arbitrarily detained anyone they perceived was threatening their hold on power. Civil and political freedoms were muzzled. AFRC and RUF brigands stole and looted at will.

World opinion resounded against the coup. The United States joined the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the UN, and the rest of the international community. The OAU authorised ECOWAS to take steps necessary to restore the elected government. From the outset America advocated a negotiated return of the Kabbah government. This policy was predicated on the desire to restore democracy without inflicting additional suffering on the already hard-pressed Sierra Leonean people.

It was clear that armed force was the only way to remove the RUF/AFRC alliance. In mid-July 1997, Tim Spicer flew to West Africa to meet ousted President Kabbah and several ECOMOG officers.

The RUF/AFRC junta was finally ousted on 10 March 1998, more than a year after they had seized power and murdered many more thousands of Sierra Leonean citizens.

On 15 November 2000 The Philadelphia Inquirer ran an article headlined 'In Sierra Leone, hard lessons for peacekeepers'. It was very direct in its criticism of the UN:

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone The largest U.N. peacekeeping operation has amassed a record of ineptitude in the months since it was despatched to restore order in this anarchic West African nation.

Slow to deploy and unprepared for hostile forces, some of the first UN troops to arrive in January were disarmed by battle-hardened Sierra Leonean rebels. In May more than 500 peacekeepers were taken hostage and the UN sparked panic when it erroneously announced that rampaging rebels were on the outskirts of Freetown.

In his most recent report on Sierra Leone to the UN, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said one of the mission's 'most urgent tasks' was to restructure the force less than a year after it was organised. This month Annan replaced the leadership of the UN Mission in

Sierra Leone known by the acronym UNAMSIL after squabbles among the multinational force's commanders went public. Two of the three largest contributors of troops, India and Jordan, have decided to pull out of the mission.

UNAMSIL has at least lived up to expectations that it would invigorate this run down seaside capital, depleted by nine years of civil war. The United Nations moved into one of the city's largest hotels and hundreds of new white UN sports utility vehicles fill the parking lots of Freetown's beachfront bars and restaurants. 'My 14-year-old son talks about UNAMSILing', said Zainab Hawa Bangura, head of Freetown's Campaign for Good Governance, a leading civic group. 'That means getting drunk, going to parties. UNAMSIL has the best cars. They have a lot of money. They can afford the best girls. That's what UNAMSIL represents.' Annan has asked the Security Council to increase the number of troops to 20 500 from the 13 000 authorised now. The new request would be more than triple the 6 000 called for thirteen months ago. The enlarged force would cost $780 million a year, making it the most expensive UN intervention.

The United Nations' experience in Sierra Leone, a former British colony the size of West Virginia with a population of about five million, helps explain the reluctance of the United Nations to intervene in Congo, where a civil war has drawn forces from six neighbouring nations into a country 32 times larger than Sierra Leone. The Security Council in December authorised a mission of 5 537 troops for Congo, but has deployed only 245 observers because hostilities have not stopped.

Annan is anxious for a success in Africa where the UN has experienced a string of failed missions in Somalia, Rwanda, and Angola. But it may take many years to produce stability in Sierra Leone.

The Security Council authorised UNAMSIL in October 1999, three months after the government of Sierra Leone and rebels led by Foday Sankoh agreed to a power-sharing arrangement. The truce was supposed to end a civil war in which rebels amputated the limbs of civilians, kidnapped children, enslaved girls, raped women, and terrorised the population. Since 1991 a half-million Sierra Leoneans have fled to neighbouring countries and hundreds of thousands more have been displaced inside the country.

The problems with the agreement began soon enough. Only 11 000 former fighters—including rebels, pro-government civil defence forces, and renegade members of the Sierra Leone army—were disarmed by the December deadline. Most of them brought in old weapons.

Sankoh's rebels became increasingly uncooperative as soon as UN troops deployed into the countryside. Most of the troops came from African countries eager to earn the $1 000 a month the United Nations pays them for each soldier, but many were untrained and poorly equipped.

In January rebels waylaid Guinean troops on their way to join UNAMSIL, seizing 400 AK-47 assault rifles and three armoured cars. Kenyan soldiers were twice relieved of weapons by Sankoh's rebels and former Sierra Leonean soldiers, who were part of a rogue element that engineered a coup against President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in 1997.

In May as UN troops began to deploy near the eastern diamond fields that provide the rebels with much of their funding, the rebels captured 500 soldiers, including Zambians,

Kenyans, and Indians. Other peacekeepers were surrounded in their garrisons, where they had insufficient supplies to withstand more than a brief siege.

Annan, in a July post mortem, said the mission suffered from poor communication, inadequate logistics, bad planning, and no support. 'An important cause of these shortcomings was the fast growth of the mission', he said. Another cause were the divisions and jealousies developing among the leadership of the UN mission. Annan this month named a new commander of the force, Lieutenant General Daniel Opande of Kenya, and a new deputy from Nigeria. Their first chore will be to find replacements for the 3 000 Indian troops and 1 800 Jordanian troops set to depart soon.

If additional troops can be located, Annan's plan for the expanded force would allow UNAMSIL to 'deploy progressively' into the diamond areas in eastern Sierra Leone. The rebels, now led by General Issa Sesay, have also agreed to resume talks to rekindle some sort of peace agreement. But after the debacle in May few people trust the rebels.

The British sent 400 troops to Sierra Leone to train the country's army to counter-attacks by rebels. The six-week training courses will continue until next year. "We're rebuilding the Sierra Leone army from scratch", said Major John Douglas, the deputy commander of the Royal Irish Battalion. "It's got to be a longterm plan until we have properly trained the officer corps. We're talking about years before we achieve it," said Douglas. "It's a five to ten year range. Whether the West is ready to be committed for that time, it's not for me to answer. That's for the politicians."

Stephen Mbogo, writing in Toward Freedom magazine said:

Writing in the International Herald Tribune last December, William Shawcross, author of Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords and a World of Endless Conflicts, argued, 'Many Sierra Leoneans yearn for the mid-1990s when a small mercenary force from South Africa, Executive Outcomes, drove the rebels out of much of the country. Even one senior UN official said to me last week, 'If Executive Outcomes had been allowed to stay, we would never have had the present crisis'. Unlike Executive Outcomes, the UN force is neither equipped nor mandated to attack, let alone defeat the rebels.'

In October 2002 Refugees International—an independent, non-profit, humanitarian organisation—published its report on the UN's mission to Sierra Leone which it considered to have been a huge success. Its astonishing report read:

In June 2002 we saw a country at peace. In May 2002, the country had its first peaceful, democratic election in more than a decade ... One of the major reasons for this transition from civil war to the beginnings of peace, stability, and democracy is the success of the UN Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which was deployed in 1999 ... it eventually became what is widely acknowledged as one of the UN's most successful peacekeeping missions.

I couldn't believe what I was reading. We had measured our success by putting an end to terror and crime. I was amazed that anyone could even begin to consider UNAMSIL's

work a success. Its involvement had cost thousands of innocent lives and allowed the country to slide out of control—and into anarchy—at a massive financial cost.

It also struck me as ironic that when African governments had pleaded for UN for assistance and support, they were promptly ignored. However, as soon as the governments took some action and began regaining control, the UN was quick to rush in and proclaim its role in bringing about stability.

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In his statement to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 5 August 2003 President Kabbah said:

My Government took measures immediately after the signing of the Abidjan Accord to implement all the obligations which for its part it had to implement under that agreement, in particular those it could implement without needing the cooperation of the RUF to do so. Thus I proclaimed and caused the granting of an amnesty to all the rebels to be gazetted; my Government terminated the contract entered into by the previous military regime with a mercenary South African security outfit, Executive Outcomes.

In principle I detest the idea of mercenaries. But in the circumstances which then prevailed and to which I succeeded, the Executive Outcomes was the only credible and dependable military outfit opposing the rebels. It had held them at bay or at least successfully delayed their overrunning the entire country up to the date of the signing of the Abidjan Accord. There was therefore a popular outcry that that outfit was to remain in Sierra Leone at least for a while. But because of the persistent demand of the RUF that they would sign the Abidjan Accord only if it contained a provision for the termination of the contract of the Executive Outcomes, I yielded to their demand in spite of popular opposition and heavy financial consequences that followed from the wrongful and premature termination of that contract.

My Government is still paying the damages which followed from such termination. But my yielding to the demand of the RUF in this respect was dictated by my eagerness to produce an early negotiated settlement of the war and a speedy restoration of peace to enable my new government to embark on the rehabilitation of the people and the economy, and the reconstruction of the extensively damaged infrastructure of the country and on meaningful development.

But alas, the real motive of the RUF for their demand for the exit of the Executive Outcomes as it turned out was to facilitate their taking over of the whole country, as with this outfit gone, there remained no credible and dependable military force to oppose and resist their advance.

Summarising the collapse of the Kabbah government and the terror Sierra Leoneans had to contend with, Elizabeth Rubin wrote a piece titled ‘Saving Sierra Leone’ which was published in the New York Times on 4 February 1999.

Part of the article had appeared in Harper’s Magazine two years previously:

Imagine a population of subsistence farmers who have had their hands and arms chopped off and must now try to till their land. That is what a band of maniacal rebels wants to create in Sierra Leone in the name of agrarian reform. Last month, they overran the capital, Freetown, and burned much of it to the ground. One of their preferred military tactics is to line up civilians and use tree stumps as tables upon which to axe off their hands.

Atrocities of this kind occur every day. Close to 3 000 people have died in fighting in the capital in the past month, and at least 50 000 have fled their homes. Bodies are piled outside the city's hospital, which is under-equipped and overwhelmed by amputees, many of them children whose mothers have had their knees hammered by rebels with names like Captain Blood. Many of the killers, too, are children who are fed on a diet of drugs and call their campaigns Operation Burn House, Operation Pay Yourself, and Operation No Living Thing.

If Sierra Leone is to survive, this insane force must be destroyed. But how? Charles Taylor, the President of neighbouring Liberia, has backed the rebels with money, training, and manpower. Clearly he should be ostracised by the world community.

But conventional diplomacy alone will not suffice because this is not a conventional war. Rather it is a complete collapse of the state. There is no real national army to rescue the people or defend the democratically elected President, Ahmed Kabbah.

Only Nigerian troops, who make up the bulk of a West African peacekeeping force known by its acronym ECOMOG, have kept the country from annihilation. The Nigerians have recaptured much of the capital, but two-thirds of the country is still at the mercy of the rebels who now also control Sierra Leone's lucrative diamond mines and so can finance their terror indefinitely. The battle is costing Nigeria more than half a million dollars a day and its under trained, underpaid, and poorly equipped troops are sustaining terrible losses: each day, some 30 soldiers are returned to Nigeria in body bags.

The Nigerians announced last Friday that they will withdraw from Sierra Leone in time for Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in May. The news sparked panic in Freetown. Many people are trying to get out of the country, fearing they will be slaughtered by the rebels.

Since the humiliating debacle in Somalia in 1993 and the killing of Belgian UN peacekeepers in Rwanda in 1994, it has become clear that the United States will not risk American lives for Africa. So what can the United States and the world do to stop the catastrophe? We could support the Nigerian force robustly. Instead we have chosen to give inadequate sums to ECOMOG. Our largest expenditure, tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid, is the equivalent of providing bandages for severed limbs. In any case the Nigerians seem determined to leave. Privately, some diplomats and Africa experts believe that one force, a mercenary army, might be able to contain the rebels' killing sprees in Sierra Leone, because it has done so before. In 1995 rebels drew within twenty miles of Freetown, and the UN, the Organisation of African Unity, and the international conflict resolution experts were unable to help. In its desperation, the Government of Sierra Leone hired Executive Outcomes, a South African mercenary army founded by apartheid era South African soldiers.

The company was willing to do what the UN cannot: take sides, take casualties, deploy overwhelming force, and fire pre-emptively. Executive Outcomes agreed to put down the rebels and restore law and order in return for $15 million and diamond mining concessions. Relying on about 200 soldiers and a helicopter gunship, it nearly succeeded: 300 000 refugees were able to return from squalid camps in neighbouring Guinea that were costing the international community $60 million a year. And within a year, the people of Sierra Leone voted in their first presidential election in 28 years.

Much of the Western press called it an African success story. The foreign diplomats and Sierra Leoneans I spoke to at the time said the country owed its stability to Executive Outcomes. Nevertheless the international community and particularly the International Monetary Fund thought it unseemly and too costly for the fledgling democracy to be so dependent on mercenaries. Three months after the mercenaries left, the country, defenceless, collapsed into terror. A year ago, the Nigerians, with some technical support from a British-based private military company called Sandline, staged a counter-assault, ousted the rebels, and reinstated Mr Kabbah.

Now we're back to square one, and some international diplomats are talking about negotiating with the rebels. President Kabbah is understandably sceptical. Executive Outcomes recently disbanded as a corporate entity, but Mr. Kabbah has been consulting with Sandline.

The United States does not want to endorse such a mission publicly, fearing that to do so would send a signal that the West lacks the political will to resolve the problem and that the world's institutions have failed. Sadly, that is exactly what is happening.

But if the United States, the Western powers, and the UN are unwilling to fight, should they prevent others from doing so? One obvious problem is that private armies conjure up images of bloodthirsty soldiers of fortune accountable to no nation state and no international laws, fighting for the highest bidder.

Yet as long as the major powers choose not to act in places like Sierra Leone and as long as Africa has no equivalent of NATO, private armies will continue to be in demand in much the same way that security businesses are in the United States. The Clinton Administration has even contracted out some of its own retired generals through a company called Military Professional Resources Inc to provide training to the Croatian and now the Bosnian army.

Constance Freeman, an Africa expert at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, shares the widespread concern that hiring private armies is risky. But, she said, 'I'm not sure the international community is in a position to say they can't [hire mercenaries] if it has nothing to offer as an alternative.'

What is needed is a debate about whether we can distinguish free wheeling mercenaries from private military companies and regulate their accountability and conduct. If we could have saved hundreds of thousands of Rwandans from genocide by spending $25 million, wouldn't it have been worth the price?

In the future, perhaps, the fear that more private military armies could be loosed upon the world will inspire the major powers to invent a more palatable solution. Until then, given the horror in Sierra Leone today, and the fact that no 'legitimate' knight in shining

armour is on the horizon to replace the Nigerians, is it wrong to let the Sierra Leoneans keep their limbs by keeping their mercenaries?

I felt grateful to Ms Rubin for her article, but I knew that the rest of the world wouldn't read what she had written and would continue to perceive us as dreadful 'racist dogs of war'. Her factual reporting did not match the dominant narrative that the South Africans had worked so hard to establish.

Indeed, some promptly referred to her as an apologist for EO.

At the 106th Congress House Hearings on 'Africa's Diamonds: Precious, Perilous too?' the hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa discussed part of Executive Outcomes' role in Sierra Leone. The chairman of the subcommittee, Edward R. Royce, said:

I would make the observation that in 1995, Executive Outcomes, and we all have concerns about Executive Outcomes, but in 1995 with 200 soldiers and sophisticated equipment they managed to push the RUF out of Freetown and out of the major diamond areas within about a month. They were cheered in the streets of Freetown for their efforts. Freetown is now under siege. How is it that 5 000 UN [this figure later escalated dramatically] peacekeepers are flailing about now against the RUF which supposedly has been disarming? I think the answer is they have not been disarming. I would also like to ask you, to the best of your knowledge, how is RUF marketing their illicit diamonds? I have heard ... Let me just make the point that some of the 23 000 former rebels who were disarmed are now rearmed with UN equipment. This is a debacle. There is no other way to look at it.

As a matter of interest the 'sophisticated equipment' that Chairman Royce claimed we were using comprised two old BMPs, a few Land Rovers, some old Bedfords, an Mi-24 gunship (for only part of the time), two old Mi-17 helicopters, small arms from the Sierra Leone army (AK-47s, PKMs, and the like) indirect support weapons (60mm and 82mm mortars and a single 120mm mortar) and standard military communications equipment.

I still wonder at the loss of life and misery caused by the folly of our exit from Sierra Leone.

33:
Illegal Support to RUF Rebels and Breaches of UN Resolutions by South Africa, Israel and Liberia

In January 1999, an Israeli businessman and ex-Israeli Defence force officer, Colonel Yair Klein, was arrested in Freetown on suspicion of aiding the RUF. He was charged with having supplied weapons and training to the rebels through a network headquartered in Liberia. It was said, at the time, that Klein was closely linked to the Liberian Anti-Terrorist Unit—many of them 'students' of MI's Fred Rindel.

According to the British-American Security Information Council (BASIC) Klein was a wanted man in Colombia where he had been charged in absentia by the Colombian judicial authorities for 'instruction and training in terrorist activities'. Some of his students went on to join the immensely powerful Medelin drug cartel.

Fred Rindel, Sean Cleary's friend, was indeed a very busy man. This was the same Rindel who, according to an agent, had used the alias 'Watson', and supplied the surface-to-air missiles that UNITA had used to shoot down aircraft operated by EO. It was similarly reported that one of these missiles had been responsible for the deaths of Louwrens Bosch and Daniel Scheurkogel. It was also likely that one of the missiles he supplied to Angola had brought down the UN aircraft that Holbrooke referred to in his exploratory hearing on Sierra Leone.

Rindel, predictably, denied these claims. But shortly afterwards when it was exposed that he was training Liberian troops (whose numbers were bolstered by RUF recruits), he cancelled his contract with Liberian president Charles Taylor and quietly left the country.

My Strategic Intelligence Group was put into hibernation in mid-1996. It had never operated in Sierra Leone so I was unable to provide supporting information to our intelligence officers there, but I still enjoyed the loyalty and friendship of many of my old agents who continued to report snippets of information to me. I was told (from Liberia) that the RUF and Liberia's Anti-terrorist Unit[352] were being trained by Rindel. I was also given to understand that men from that unit at times fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the RUF in Sierra Leone. It seems they were trained in terrorism rather than in anti-terrorist actions.

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In terms of distance and accessibility, South Africa could have been on the opposite side of the world from Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, several South Africans were willing to provide both direct and indirect support to the RUF. Their motive, of course, was greed. The fact that their support to the rebels would result in many thousands of people being maimed, raped, tortured, burnt alive, or massacred, was not part of the equation. They needed the continent to remain ablaze so that they could extract its resources—diamonds in particular—for their own selfish financial gain.

As was expected, Military Intelligence and the Department of Foreign Affairs had also very quickly joined the RUF chorus demanding Executive Outcomes be removed from Sierra Leone. The extent of that support only became known long after EO had left Sierra Leone.

Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, had the following to say during the exploratory hearing on Sierra Leone diamonds at the Security Council on 31 July 2000:

Given this broad consensus among members of the Security Council, positive engagement of private industry, and the vigilant attention of the NGO community, I believe that we have the opportunity—or at least the first glimmerings of an opportunity—to break the deadly link between illegally-mined diamonds and the terrible human toll they extract in Sierra Leone.

I recognise full well that this kind of candour and this kind of explicit statement is not always welcome at the UN and does cause controversy. And I know that both delegations will ask for the right of reply to say that we are perpetrating an injustice on their countries. Perhaps some of the countries of Africa will criticise us for breaking the taboo of naming specific names and specific people by title who are involved in this dreadful event...

The United States intends to support measures against both Burkina Faso and Liberia unless they cease their support for the war in Sierra Leone. It's certainly true that some members of the Council may seek to dilute these measures or even consider vetoing such steps, but we urge them to reconsider. We have supported the proposal of a Security Council Mission to Sierra Leone, along the lines of the mission that you, Mr Chairman headed to Kosovo, Ambassador Anjaba headed to East Timor, and I was privileged to head to the DRC and Ethiopia/Eritrea. I hope that this Security Council mission will take place and, when it takes place that it visits the hospitals and camps housing the victims of this conflict.

Mr Chairman, there is another deeply troubling image from Sierra Leone which we must address here today. During the recent fighting, led by the Indians at the breakout of the Kailahun, at least one shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile from the RUF was found. I think we need to be clear. A year ago, the RUF were drug-crazed, machete-wielding thugs. They are now acquiring machine guns, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and the means to shoot down aircraft. This is extraordinarily dangerous not only for the region but for the United Nations. You will all recall in Angola that a similar weapon shot down a UN C-130 carrying 13 of our colleagues...diamonds have provided RUF leaders the means to fund their nine-year insurgency ... We estimate that the RUF has garnered 30 to 50 million, and perhaps as much as 125 million dollars a year from the illicit sale of diamonds.

The RUF dissident commander, Bockarie, also known as 'Mosquito', transported diamonds to Liberia to buy arms and other supplies in 1998. Credible sources have reported that a senior RUF ally laundered more than $12 million worth of diamonds in Monrovia in late 1998 alone.

Most of this diamond trade moves through Liberia, but in the late 1990s Guinea reportedly was a transit route for some 40% of the smuggled Sierra Leone diamonds. Significant quantities subsequently transcended the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, probably for sale to South African and European buyers. The diamonds may also pass through Russia, Switzerland, or Holland prior to their arrival in Antwerp.

…In regard to arms trafficking to Sierra Leone, Mr Chairman, we remain concerned and I would like to add a few more items to the record. The principal African countries involved in arms trafficking to the RUF although they deny it include Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Libya.

In regard to trafficking, arms brokers have played a vital role in keeping the RUF supplied with weapons and other military materiel. A well-known arms and diamond dealer in Sierra Leone, Zief Morganstein, in July 1999 arranged for a Continental Aviation-based charter out of Dakar to fly a shipment of small arms from Bulgaria to Sierra Leone. Last year the RUF received 68 tons of weapons from Bulgaria, which Morganstein may have helped arrange. There have been other connections between former government officials from South Africa during its apartheid regime who now operate as private individuals, including ... Fred Rindel, the [former] South African Defence Attaché in Washington, who now works as a security consultant in Liberia and trains Liberian troops and RUF insurgents.[353] There are other charges about other businessmen who are reportedly helping the Sierra Leone government from various countries around the world.

In December 2000 a UN panel investigating on diamonds and arms in Sierra Leone reported:

Fred Rindel, a retired officer of the South African Defence Force and former Defence Attaché to the United States, has played a key role in the training of a Liberian anti-terrorist unit, consisting of Liberian soldiers and groups of foreigners, including citizens of Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Niger, and The Gambia.

The panel interviewed Mr Rindel extensively. Rindel was contracted as a security consultant by President Charles Taylor in September 1998, and training started in November 1998. The contract included consultancy services and strategic advice to convert Charles Taylor's former rebel militia into a professional unit. The Anti- terrorist Unit is used in Liberia to protect government buildings, the Executive Mansion, and the international airport, and to provide VIP Security and the protection of foreign embassies. The numbers trained were approximately 1 200. Because of negative media attention, Rindel cancelled his contract in Liberia in August 2000.

In 1998, ECOMOG identified a plane, registration number N71RD, owned by a South African company, Dodson Aviation Maintenance and Spare Parts,[354] as having carried weapons to Robertsfield in September of that year. The plane is a Gulfstream 14-seater business jet that cannot be used for arms transport, but there are other relevant connections. Fred Rindel was the owner of Dodson. The company was closed on 31 December 1998, but during the period under investigation, the plane was leased and

operated by Greater Holdings (Liberia) Ltd., a company with gold and diamond concessions in Liberia. The plane was used for the transportation of the Greater Holdings' staff to and from Liberia. Niko Shefer is a businessman in South Africa and he was Chairman/CEO of the Greater Diamond Company (Liberia) Ltd, a subsidiary of Greater Holdings... Fred Rindel states that he has never had any involvement with diamonds in Liberia and was never approached by anyone in Liberia with regard to diamonds. According to the Liberian Minister of Mines, however, Rindel was involved in a diamond project with the son of President Taylor, Charles Taylor Jr.

Rindel includes a reference to De Decker Diamonds (Pty) Ltd on his business card. Rindel was also contracted as consultant on a mineral and geological survey of the gold potential in the Mano and Nimba areas of Liberia. Geologists from South Africa were hired for the purpose. Rindel acquired the gold and other mineral rights for two concessions on behalf of a Bermuda based company, the Bermuda Holding Corporation, a company in which President Charles Taylor and some of his relatives hold interests. Rindel was also negotiating with a number of international companies to form joint ventures with the Bermuda corporation. Mr Rindel denies bringing other South Africans to Liberia as trainers. During his time in Liberia, however, there were several other South Africans there, including Meno Uys, Gert Keelder, and Faber Oosthuyzen[355] ... Neither Rindel nor the other South Africans applied for authorisation under the South African Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act (1998), because, in his case, according to Rindel, his services were purely of a protective nature and did not include any combat training, or training of armed forces in Liberia. The RUF were also receiving weapons and training in Liberia from not only South Africans but also from Libya and Guinea.

There are innumerable accounts in RUF written reports, in oral testimony given to the Panel, and in police and military intercepts, of high-level RUF meetings with President Taylor, RUF travel to Monrovia, RUF strategy meetings at the Executive Mansion, RUF travel on Liberian helicopters, RUF staging bases at Camp Schefflein, Voinjama, and Foya-Kama. Liberia has provided the families of many senior RUF officials with a safe haven. Eyewitness accounts speak of RUF fighters being treated in Monrovia hospitals. Most recently, Gibril Massaquoi, acting as RUF spokesman on issues relating to the 10 November 2000 cease-fire, has been interviewed in, and has made his press statements from Monrovia.

Despite this blatant evidence against the RUF and its allies, Greg Campbell preferred to focus his attack on Executive Outcomes in his book Blood Diamonds, in which he falsely claims:

Hiring Executive Outcomes was not cheap, but if Strasser's government lacked money, it surely had diamond mines and exploration concessions to give away. A contract was signed with EO that in effect legalised war bounty. If the company could rout the rebels from the diamond areas, the government would grant it rights to those mines. EO had done this before most notably in Angola.

The government paid EO in diamond-mining concessions and EO promptly sold the rights to a close 'friend', Branch Energy Limited.

One would have expected an award-winning journalist like Campbell to at least have done some basic research to get his facts right, but he didn't bother. The allegations that EO was paid in diamond mining concessions or that it sold diamond mining concessions were blatant lies, presumably aimed at deflecting blame from those who were indeed doing just that.

Of course, the false narrative on Executive Outcomes had to be sustained as Africa had to remain at conflict with itself. This would give those who fuelled the conflicts and wars access to the continent.

Ambassador Richard Holbrooke gave testimony about the diamond trade in Sierra Leone (Photo U S State Department)

34:
Taking and Releasing Hostages in Sierra Leone

Despite Pres ident Kabbah having been restored to power, the war in Sierra Leone was far from over.

On 19 October 1998,[356] 24 Sierra Leonean army officers, including the brother of Major Koroma—the junta leader—were executed by firing squad, despite UN appeals for clemency. The locals were invited to attend the executions which were conducted by the military. After the condemned were killed by gunfire, the locals cheered and danced. Koroma escaped capture and the RUF's leader, Foday Sankoh was sentenced to death in absentia.

The scattered elements of the People's Army of Sierra Leone (PASL)—a mixture of the RUF and the SLA—afraid to lay down their arms and surrender, launched a campaign of incredible terror against the civilian population and once again, torture, rape, murder, mutilation, robbery, abduction, and slavery became the order of the day.

The new Sierra Leone Army, known by many as the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), supported by ECOMOG forces, continued trying to drive the rebels away from Freetown. The war now moved deep into the jungles and outlying towns and villages.

Through poor planning, inadequate logistics, a lack of coherent strategy, outdated doctrine, and a lack of command and control, the new offensive against the rebels rapidly lost momentum. The combined CDF-ECOMOG force failed to stabilise the country, giving the rebels the opportunity to consolidate their stranglehold over large areas and continue and expand their reign of terror.

In December 1998 the rebels managed to infiltrate Freetown and even occupied large areas close to the capital. They also succeeded in capturing the presidential palace, the radio station, and the port of Freetown. However, Lungi International Airport and parts of Freetown remained under ECOMOG control.

Neall Ellis[357]—an ex-South African Air Force gunship pilot who had seen action in Angola with the SADF and had also flown for both Executive Outcomes and Sandline International in Sierra Leone—was at times the only effective barrier between the murderous rebels and the innocent civilians in and around Freetown.

Flying countless individual missions with no other support, a continually exhausted Neall and his crew kept the rebels at bay with machine guns and rockets. This prompted the rebels to issue him a warning:

'If we ever catch you, we will cut out your heart and eat it.' Neall and his crew were not intimidated by this threat.

In December 1998, the RUF began its final offensive to retake Freetown.

By late December 1998/early January 1999 as the situation spun out of control, the United States and the British military began evacuating their citizens and other trapped foreigners. The war had now entered what was arguably its most savage period as the

drug-crazed West Side Boys again entered Freetown and launched another campaign of terror. President Kabbah was again forced to flee the city.

The ECOMOG contingents were hurriedly reinforced with additional Nigerian and Ghanaian troops and a new counter-offensive was launched.

On 8 January 1999, the Nigerian Air Force's Alpha Jets, supported by Neil Ellis and his crew, launched air attacks on the most important rebel positions in the Freetown area. Three days of bloody fighting followed, during which the CDF and ECOMOG forces finally managed to regain a semblance of control over Freetown. Estimates of civilian casualties were put at around 6 000. The rebel casualties were estimated to be 'considerable'.

In February, a UN-negotiated settlement, known as the Lomé Peace Accord, was finally signed, officially bringing the war to an end—or so it was thought.

With the war 'officially' over, the UN was again keen to be seen strutting around in Sierra Leone, to show that it was indeed doing something. The Security Council revoked the arms and oil embargoes against Sierra Leone and the Observer Mission to Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) appointed its first Special Envoy.

One of UNOMSIL's first tasks was to document human-rights abuses and atrocities against civilians. The Sierra Leonean journalists who had bravely remained in-country during these dangerous times were able to assist greatly in this venture.

UN-sponsored negotiations between the government and rebel forces began in May of 1999, and an agreement was reached on 7 July. Sankoh again evaded any accountability for his actions; he was pardoned and released from the death sentence he was facing for treason. He also demanded—and received—the position of Chairman of a Special Commission on Strategic Resources: a high-level position that gave him control over the diamonds that lay at the root of Sierra Leone's conflict. I was astonished by the UN's stupidity in this latest attempt to secure a semblance of peace in a country that was being devoured by Sankoh's rebels.

The Lomé Peace Accord was designed to end hostilities and result in the formation of a government of national unity; with the agreement signed, the UN Security Council authorised an increase in the size of the observer mission (UNOMSIL) to 210 observers under resolution 1 260 (1999) on 20 August. What the observers aimed to achieve, only they knew.

Two months later, on 22 October, the UN Security Council authorised a much larger mission to Sierra Leone, which then became known as the 'United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone' (UNAMSIL). Under UN Resolution 1 270 (1999), the mission was to have a strength of 6 000 troops, while the number of military observers would increase to 260. I found this force level astonishing.

Nominated as Force Commander of UNAMSIL was Indian Army Major General Vijay Jetley. UNAMSIL's mission was to assist the government and other warring parties in implementing the provisions of the Lomé Peace Accord. UNOMSIL was terminated on the same day.

In late November 1999, an advance party of 133 Kenyan troops arrived at Lungi International Airport. They, along with Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Guinean troops who had

been deployed in Sierra Leone as part of the ECOMOG forces were re- mustered into a UN peacekeeping force. Additional detachments from India, Jordan, Bangladesh, and Zambia were brought in to bolster the cobbled-together UN force. I sensed that these forces had no common doctrine. They did not even conduct thorough marrying up drills. I suspected they were doomed to fail before they even started any so-called peacekeeping operations. Humiliation would soon follow.

On 19 January 2000, a group of Guinean soldiers were captured by the rebels at Bormoi Junction. They were released shortly thereafter, but the incident proved that the rebels had the capacity and the inclination to disrupt and deny UN troop movements.

Less than a month later, on 7 February, the UN was forced to adopt another resolution (Resolution 1 289), increasing the military component of UNAMSIL to 11 000. In May, a new further resolution, Resolution 1 299, allowed the force to be increased by an additional 2 000 men. The UN peacekeepers soon learnt that there could be no peacekeeping if there was no peace. Inevitably, sides would be chosen or eyes closed to the indiscretions of the rebel forces as they had been in Angola.

Despite the presence of the UN peacekeeping force, the rebels were still able to attack targets at will and they still controlled large parts of the country. The UN was once again in disarray and the new Sierra Leonean Army was on the defensive. The UN had become subject to 'mission creep'—the belief that throwing money and men at a problem, and then debating its resolution, would solve it. However, this was all due to the UN's inability to develop and implement a coherent strategy.

On 1 May 2000, the situation took a turn for the worse.

A Nigerian patrol was ambushed by rebels near Port Loko. The following day, a force of approximately 100 rebels surrounded the UNAMSIL base at Makeni and demanded the immediate release of all rebel prisoners. The request was turned down, and the rebels attacked and killed four Kenyan troops and wounded three more. On the same day, another rebel group captured the crew and five passengers of a UN Mi-8 helicopter. By evening on 2 May, the rebels were holding seventeen UNAMSIL personnel as hostages.

Within 24 hours, the UN found itself caught up in a rapidly deteriorating situation. Fortunately, matters did not descend into total anarchy thanks to an alliance between the Kamajor-dominated Civil Defence Force and former rebels from the West Side Boys. This alliance continued to take the war to rebels hiding deep in the jungle.

On 3 May, the rebels captured another 49 UNAMSIL troops.

By 5 May, they were holding a total of 318 UNAMSIL personnel hostage. A day later, UNAMSIL HQ lost all radio contact with a Zambian APC convoy—the rebels had captured the entire column and taken 208 Zambian troops hostage.

On 6 May, a large rebel force of approximately 800 men captured Lunsar and began its advance on Masiaka, forcing a 220 man UNAMSIL force to abandon their positions and withdraw. That a supposed well-armed peacekeeping force was compelled to abandon the people they were there to protect in the face of an ill- disciplined rebel force was mind boggling. It also illustrated the UN's complete lack of political and military will.

As the crisis steadily worsened, the UN Secretary-General pleaded for a Rapid Reaction Force consisting primarily of professional Western troops. Although understandably

reluctant to get involved in the situation, the UK finally agreed to despatch a contingent (drawn from the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment) to evacuate 500 British nationals from Freetown.

The operation was authorised by the UK's Ministry of Defence on 7 May.

That same day, elements of 1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, flew out aboard three aircraft from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire and made a brief stopover in Senegal before arriving in Sierra Leone. Their mission was to secure the Lungi International Airport and parts of Freetown, and open the route between the two locations. They were also tasked with providing protection and security for the trapped British, European Union, and Commonwealth citizens who were due to be evacuated out of Sierra Leone.

What became known as Operation Palliser was placed under the command of Brigadier David Richards. In support was a British Amphibious Ready Group consisting of the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, the helicopter assault carrier HMS Ocean (carrying Chinook CH2 helicopters of No.7 Squadron RAF), HMS Argyll, HMS Chatham, RFA (Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship) Fort Austin plus additional escorts and amphibious vessels. Royal Marines of 42 Commando were also embarked.

On 8 May, RUF forces opened fire on demonstrators outside Sankoh's house in Freetown, killing as many as twenty people. The British, keen to prevent losing their own men to such indiscriminate rebel shootings, made it known that they would open fire to defend themselves.

The naval task force arrived off Freetown on 12 May.

Meanwhile, the US Navy stationed the USS Thunderbolt—with US Navy SEALs (US Navy Special Forces) on board—off the coast as a 'precautionary measure'.

Negotiations over the release of captured UN personnel went into high gear, with Liberian President Charles Taylor and special US envoy Reverend Jesse Jackson conducting a dialogue with the rebels. The irony of Taylor's engagement with the rebels on behalf of an incompetent UN was not lost on me. Not only had Taylor been supportive of South Africa's Rindel in training RUF rebels in Liberia, he was known to be assisting in the illegal sale of diamonds from that country.

With British paratroopers in position to defend Freetown, the demoralised and shaken UNAMSIL peacekeepers could now call in reinforcements to assist them in restoring order to the chaotic UN mission.

Some of the local private security personnel—including Neall Ellis—were still in Sierra Leone. Despite having been left without an employer and not having been paid for over a year, Neall continued flying and attacking rebels at every opportunity, and soon became a local hero in Freetown—a well-deserved accolade for a man who had single-handedly saved thousands of civilians. The British even placed a Royal Air Force (RAF) Squadron Leader on Neall's team to better coordinate his operations and eventually took over the responsibility of issuing pay cheques to him and his small crew.

Once the evacuation of British and other foreign nationals had been successfully completed, the British paratroopers, as part of their mission, were to remain in Sierra Leone to support the UN and allow badly needed supplies to be brought in.

By 10 May, the total number of UNAMSIL troops held hostage by the rebels had swelled to around 500.

On 11 May, an Indian reaction force of company strength facilitated the breakout of 200 Kenyan troops being held under siege at Makeni and Magburaka. After this, four British military observers escaped from their rebel hostage-takers in Makeni and made their way to Mile 91 where they were picked up and taken to safety. On the same day, Foday Sankoh was finally recaptured by SAS and government forces and flown to a secure area in a British helicopter.

Still on 11 May, the rebels agreed to release 139 peacekeepers to the Liberians. On 18 May, an additional 15 UNAMSIL hostages were released.

By 28 May, all the 500 UN personnel being held captive had been freed. At Kuiva and Kailahun, Indian troops remained surrounded but they could be re-supplied by helicopter.

Even with the British forces in place and the UN hostages released, the overall security situation in Sierra Leone began again to deteriorate. Clashes between the Sierra Leone Army and the rebels occurred across the country. Nigerian troops intervened in one firefight between Newton and Songo, supporting the SLA with anti- aircraft guns and rocket launchers. Nigerian, Ghanaian, and SLA troops constantly came under fire from rebels throughout the country.

On 17 May, rebels brazenly opened fire on British paratroopers and Nigerian troops at Lungi, probably thinking they were foreigners who would pack their bags and run. The paras didn't run—they retaliated and in the ensuing ten-minute firefight, four rebels were killed.

On 23 May, men of 1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, were relieved by 42 Royal Marine Commando, supported by 20 Commando Battery, Royal Artillery, 539 Assault Squadron, and members of the Special Boat Squadron.

Operation Palliser finally ended on 15 June and the Royal Marines returned to their support vessel HMS Ocean.

Two companies of the 5/8th Gorkha Rifles[358] deployed to Kailahun but were quickly surrounded by hundreds of rebels. Given the situation in Sierra Leone, the UN realised that it could no longer sit idly by while the rebels maintained their offensive posture. Not only was UNAMSIL's incompetence making the rebels confident—and demoralising the local population—the UN was coming under increasing pressure to resolve the messy situation they had created.

Eventually, the UN was forced to plan its own rescue mission.

A new UNAMSIL operation was planned with the intention of restoring the UN's battered integrity.

Phase 1 of what would become known as Operation Khukri[359] commenced on 13 June. Elements from India, Ghana, and Nigeria, with aircraft from the RAF as well as members of D Squadron Special Air Service in support, were deployed. By evening of the following day, the forces were in their starting positions and awaiting orders.

Phase 2 commenced shortly after dawn on 15 June. Assault and stopper-groups moved into their positions. Two RAF Chinook helicopters, guided into position by members of

the SAS, dropped off additional stopper groups just south of Kailahun. The combat force encountered some rebel resistance but by midday, the rebel force had been driven off and the surrounded companies relieved. The success of Operation Khukri provided a much-needed boost in morale for the UNAMSIL forces. This brief operation was heralded as a major UN success story.

Things were, however, not as they should have been within UNAMSIL.

In August the UNAMSIL Force Commander, Major General Vijay Jetley, abruptly resigned his post in disgust and left the mission.

The British Guardian obtained a leaked copy of Jetley's unofficial report on his decision to resign.

He made some damning accusations regarding the situation in Sierra Leone:

It is well known that public opinion in Nigeria was against the continued deployment of Nigerian troops as part of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone, however the Nigerian Army was interested in staying in Sierra Leone due to the massive benefits they were getting from the illegal diamond mining. Brig Gen Maxwell Khobe was commonly known as the 'Ten Million man', it is alleged that he received up to ten million dollars to permit the activities of RUF. The ECOMOG Force Commander Maj Gen Kpamber was also involved in the illegal diamond mining in connivance with RUF leader Foday Sankoh. After the initial fighting between ECOMOG and RUF, the relationship had thawed when a stalemate had been reached militarily. It is understood that a tacit understanding was reached between the RUF and ECOMOG of non-interference in each other's activities, the total absence of ECOMOG deployment in RUF held areas is indicative of this. I believe that the RUF leader Foday Sankoh was also under the impression that the UN Peace Keeping Force agreed to in Lomé was primarily hatted as ECOMOG with Maj Gen Kpamber as its boss. The deployment of a neutral peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL) under an Indian General, keen to implement the Peace Accord in letter and spirit was not what Sankoh had bargained for. He viewed UNAMSIL as a big obstacle in his ambition of becoming the next President of Sierra Leone.

Major General Vijay Jetley left Sierra Leone in disgust (photo: CBS News)

Jetley also complained of the serious logistical problems UNAMSIL was encountering in the field with regard to transport, fuel, rations, communications, water, and camp infrastructure. He concluded his report with:

UN Peace Keeping operations are a combination of diplomacy and tact. Generally in African countries the Peace Accord signed is shaky and fragile. In a mineral rich country like Sierra Leone, politics has a very major role to play in finding solutions to civil wars. In my case, the Mission Directive given to me and which I tried to follow implicitly, directly conflicted with the interests of not only the warring factions but also of the major players in the diamond racket like Liberia and Nigeria. As an Indian, and having no hidden agenda to promote, I became a victim of the machinations of these countries. By placing their stooges in the right places they have not only tried to scuttle the peace process but also try and denigrate me and the country I represent, to promote their own personal ambitions and personal interests.

I could sympathise with Jetley as I too had witnessed the UN's reluctance to make any positive contribution towards ending conflicts and sustaining peace. Besides, if there was peace, the UN would have no decisive role to play…so it was in their best interests that the conflict should continue.

No action was taken on Jetley's scathing attack on the prevailing conditions and, as was customary, the UN simply turned a blind eye and bade him farewell. The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, quickly named Lieutenant General Daniel Ishmael Opande of Kenya as the replacement commander for UNAMSIL.

The British Army, however, viewed the fragile situation in Sierra Leone as an ideal opportunity to train a new army for the benighted country. During the course of this training programme, a patrol from the Royal Irish Rangers under command of Major Alan Marshall, along with their Sierra Leonean guide, entered a 'no-go area'. It was 25 August 2000.

A renegade faction of the West Side Boys, operating out of the Occra Hills area, captured Major Marshall's patrol, along with their guide, their three Land- Rovers, and their weapons. They were taken to a rebel village hideout at Gberi Bana commanded by a rebel leader known as Foday Kallay. According to Sierra Leonean sources, Kallay had been a commander in the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council— unlike many of his thugs, who had never been soldiers or seen combat.

The soldiers were not harmed, but their guide, Corporal Mousa Bengura, was not so fortunate; he was subjected to severe beatings and depravation at the hands of the rebels. After several days of negotiations, Kallay and his bunch of criminals were given a satellite telephone in exchange for the release of five of the Irish captives, but soon after that the negotiations reached a stalemate.

Unbeknown to the captives, an unusual delegation set out from Freetown to visit the renegade West Side Boys' base. It consisted of mothers of the rebels on a mission to persuade their sons to release the remaining British hostages. They came bearing

traditional gifts of milk, sugar, and bread. The initiative had been organised by Major Johnny Paul Koroma himself.

The rebels welcomed their mothers and accepted their gifts, but refused to release the prisoners. Kallay, in turn, wrote a letter to Koroma and addressed a copy to the British High Commissioner. The mothers took these letters back to Freetown.

They contained demands for a new government to be set up, with Foday Kallay as a 'senior member'. Kallay also declared himself the new chairman of the AFRC. The letter was signed: Brigadier General Foday Kallay, leader of the West Side Boys and the AFRC.

This letter was the worst slap in the face that Foday Kallay could possibly have sent to the British forces. In short, it was a declaration of war.

The British Army believed that Major Marshall and his men could only be released by means of an aggressive hostage-release operation—an action that became known as Operation Barras.

Sheka Tarawalie, a Sierra Leonean newspaper editor, also believed it was highly unlikely the hostages would be released without forceful intervention. He wrote:

...it seemed three forces were itchy to make or save a name. First, the British wanted to display military might (albeit late in the 11-year war) so that whatever good might come out of the peace process in Sierra Leone would ultimately be alluded to them—because as early as 3 September 2000 the British planning team had already arrived in Senegal for the operation in Sierra Leone, and UK Prime Minister Blair 'had already given permission to mount the rescue several days earlier'. Second, the original West Side Boys wanted to teach their former comrade Kallay and his gang a lesson for not listening to the calls of their leader Johnny Paul Koroma to join in being retrained as the new Sierra Leone Army. And third, President Kabbah wanted an example from the British to further justify his earlier Nigerian-led intervention against the West Side Boys. (This intervention was smeared by the infamous 'arms to Africa' row over British officials having deals with Sandline International, which has been linked with mercenary operations, by breaking a UN embargo to supply arms to President Kabbah's forces). Thus Operation Barras came about. The British Army could not rely on the possibility of its soldiers being released unharmed and decided to proceed with the hostage release operation.

Waiting in the wings, was the UN—also keen to imply that the operation, if successful, could be added to their minuscule repertoire of successful operations even if only to allude that Operation Barras had been conducted under their aegis.

Extracts from an article later written by Michael Evans, the Defence Editor for Tactical Air, described Operation Barras as follows:

A risky venture eighteen days ago by eleven soldiers of The Royal Irish Regiment, commanded by a major, led yesterday to one of the most hazardous and comprehensive rescue operations mounted by the British forces for decades. Operation Barras, codename for the dramatic rescue, produced the desired result, the safe release of the six remaining hostages.

The drama began at 6.16am, after two weeks of intensive planning and training. A total of 272 Service personnel were involved, including 100 men of D Squadron 22 SAS, a unit from the Royal Marines' Special Boat Service, and 110 soldiers from the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment.

Operation Barras was a two-pronged attack, with a company from 1 Para abseiling from Chinook helicopters on to a landing site close to the West Side Boys' jungle hideout. Their task was to take the village of Magbeni, one of two locations controlled by the renegade militia, which are divided by Rockel Creek. On the other side, 100 yards from the water, was the village of Gberi Bana, where the six soldiers from The Royal Irish Regiment were being held hostage.

The hostage-takers in Gberi Bana were attacked from both north and south for, as the SAS arrived from the north, armed frogmen of the SBS crossed the creek underwater and opened fire as they emerged in the semi-darkness.

Although the six British hostages were grabbed unharmed from their captors, military sources said it took about two hours from the launch of the rescue operation to when the men from The Royal Irish Regiment landed safely on board the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel, Sir Percivale, moored off Freetown.

The ferocity of the gunfight between the British troops and the West Side Boys became clear when the final casualty toll was released. By the end of the fighting, according to Ministry of Defence sources [MoD] in London, at least 25 West Side Boys lay dead, among them three women. Eighteen more, including another three women and the Boys' 25-year-old leader, the self-styled 'Brigadier' Foday Kallay [sic], had been taken prisoner and handed over to a company of Jordanian troops, who had earlier secured the road into Magbeni village. The prisoners were later handed over to the Sierra Leone police.

On the British side, one soldier died, another was seriously injured, although his life is not in danger, and eleven more were wounded.

The rescue operation was a success, but it was forced on the Government because of what appears to have been a reckless mission into the Occra Hills by The Royal Irish Regiment patrol. Even yesterday MoD officials were still unable to explain why the men had turned off the highway. The major, they said, would be expected to provide the answers. An internal MoD inquiry will now be held.[360]

Reflecting on Operation Barras, Lewis would later claim—erroneously—that:

> Operation Barras, a show of awesome military strength and professionalism by the British military, was the beginning of the end for the rebels ... The men of the Operation Barras assault force had done more than simply rescue the British and Sierra Leonean hostages. They had, in effect, brought about an end to ten years of terrible civil war and appalling suffering in Sierra Leone.

The legacy of the war in Sierra Leone will be felt by many generations to come in that ill-fated country. Soldiers of many different nationalities played their part in bringing a rocky peace to Sierra Leone, but the unmatched role played by the men of Executive

Outcomes supported by the Sierra Leonean Army and the local population should never be overlooked or forgotten.

Ironically, most works covering the conflict in Sierra Leone have been keen to omit the role played by the men of Executive Outcomes, and many academics and authors still view EO as the cause of the conflict.

Neill Ellis who can be credited with almost single-handedly keeping the RUF at bay (Photo Flyafrica)

35:
An Assassination to Order

A few minutes before 07:00 on 19 March 1996, I was on the N1 between Pretoria and Johannesburg on my way to meet a diplomat from an African country. According to the intermediary who had made initial contact, he wished to discuss a 'very secret' situation, and his government apparently needed EO's help.

The urgent request had come the previous day.

To retain control over the meeting, I had set the place and time, and conducted a reconnaissance of the area (the Sandton Sun Hotel) the previous day. I had also assembled a small support team who were already in place in case I was being set up.

I contemplated the irony of the situation; the more the media—especially in South Africa—referred to us as 'racist dogs of war', the more African governments clamoured for our advice and help. Here I was on my way to meet the representative of another one.

Believing that UNITA would never forgive me or Executive Outcomes for their numerous defeats in Angola, Nico had thought the caller might be a UNITA agent intent on killing me—even though we had long since left the country. My pistol had been my constant companion since two previous attempts on my life (one with a car bomb and the other by someone posing as Dutch journalist, 'De Boer').

I knew that our telephone calls were being monitored by MI's counter-intelligence section,[361] so I assumed I would develop a tail[362] as soon as I left my office.

Checking my rear-view mirror, I picked up the Military Intelligence surveillance team, desperately trying to follow me through the early morning traffic. I shook my head at their stupidity. Had they really thought I wouldn't spot them, or that their battered Toyotas and Fords would keep up with a Mercedes Benz SLK?

For the moment I decided to play along and let them believe I wasn't aware of their existence.

An incoming phone call re-routed to my cell phone sliced through my thoughts. Despite the heavy early morning traffic I took the call.

A man with a Pakistani accent identified himself only as 'Zahir' and asked me to meet him urgently. I knew the accent—I had spent time working with Pakistan's armed forces in their disputed territories. That seemed like centuries before.

I was used to getting phone calls from people all over the world, wishing to see me urgently, many of them with hare-brained schemes (like overthrowing governments and helping them to seize power) in mind. They seemed to believe that promising me large amounts of cash would immediately persuade me to deploy Executive Outcomes to help them.

"Mister Zahir," I said, "I'm really not interested—God knows, I hear enough silly schemes. I'm on my way to meet a potential client so I don't have time to talk right now".

"Please, Mr Barlow," Zahir pleaded. "I'm not some sort of maniac or person of poor character. I represent a Far Eastern government. They believe that only you can solve the

delicate problem they are facing. So far no one has been able to provide a solution, although many have tried and failed."

"If, as you say, you represent a foreign government, what proof of that can you supply me with?"

"Only trust and my word, sir. We have been told by many that you can be trusted and that you honour your word. All I can say is that I must meet and talk to you face- to-face. The decision to help or not will be in your hands. The fate of innocent people will rest solely on your conscience."

I was intrigued by the last part of what Zahir had said, so I asked him to call me back three hours later.

He didn't sound like one of the unhinged idiots I so often heard from and nor did he have the arrogance I had come to associate with so many journalists.

I needed time to set things up and meet him on my own ground in case he was employed by someone more sinister than a government. On my own turf, I had a sense of control that wasn't always available to me at a neutral venue. I decided to err on the side of caution—just in case.

The traffic close to the Grayston Drive off-ramp near Sandton was getting heavier by the minute. Early morning traffic in Johannesburg could be as bad as anywhere in the world—sometimes even worse. The radio station played some faded old pop song before the seven o' clock news bulletin came on air.

As I approached Grayston Drive I accelerated and started weaving through the traffic to shake off the surveillance team on my tail. The traffic lights had just changed to amber as I raced onto the off-ramp and as I sped through, they changed to red.

Checking my rear-view mirror again, I noticed that they had overshot the exit ramp. I had indeed lost my tail.

I was so used to being followed around that I regarded the intelligence services in much the same way as an irritating fly or mosquito. I wasn't allowed to stop them in the manner I would have liked to, so I just lived with them and lost them when I needed to. In turn, they regarded me and my employees as a 'threat to national security' because we had been working for the Angolan and Sierra Leonean governments. I couldn't see how training the Angolan Army to defeat UNITA, or halting the RUF's terror tactics in Sierra Leone, could have been a threat to South Africa's national security unless there was something more at stake. By then, I suspected that there probably was, and that it was related to the diamond industry.

Even if the MI surveillance team suspected I was heading for Sandton Towers they wouldn't know that an advance team had already booked me a room at the Sandton Sun Hotel under an assumed name. They would also have no way of knowing that one of my men would give me the room key in the parking garage and then take my car for a drive around Johannesburg while I was in the meeting.

The African diplomat had been contacted by a go-between and given clear and concise instructions as to when and how contact would be made between us. He had also been led to believe that some of our men were shadowing him because we thought him important and wanted to ensure our intelligence services weren't following him. All of this was

untrue, but it would force him to think twice if he intended to do anything other than discussing his government's problems with me.

Prior to our meeting, the hotel room had been routinely swept for listening devices. This was really a bit of a joke as the services had neither the equipment nor the manpower to maintain their watch on us. In addition, we knew what types of listening devices the services used—we had sold many of them to the services in the first place. As if that wasn't enough, the services had, on occasion, even asked to borrow our counter-measures equipment; it was more modern and hi-tech than theirs. We had always obliged them.

The meeting went off much as expected. The client was well spoken, neatly dressed, arrogant, and obviously accustomed to getting his way. I placed my briefcase on the table and, unnoticed, flicked the recording switch to activate the built-in tape recorder. This would guarantee an accurate record of what took place.

The diplomat introduced himself as 'David', and in a French accent, said he was 'an emissary' from his president. I summed him up as an intelligence officer.

"My President has a delicate problem that needs to be resolved soon," David stated matter-of-factly. "A ruling party member thinks he ought to be the president and we want him eliminated."

I didn't respond; I wanted him to lay all his cards on the table before I asked any questions. The thought had also entered my mind that this could be the start of an entrapment operation to prove EO's alleged contempt for the law.

"What we have in mind," David continued, "is for some of your black men[363] to visit our country as tourists. We will give them a detailed briefing on arrival and supply them with weapons. It is very important that they follow instructions precisely as we want the assassination to be blamed on the opposition party. After the elimination, they will return the weapons to us for destruction and they will leave the country. We estimate the operation should take about two weeks. We will pay you US$ one million for the task—half upfront in a bank account of your choice and the balance after your men have left the country, providing the target has been eliminated."

It was now obvious that both David and his president thought we were a group of renegade soldiers willing to do anything for money. After all, that was how the South African—and international—media had chosen to portray us. He couldn't have been further from the mark.

"Perhaps you should tell me who your president is and why the target is such a threat—apart from wanting to be president?"

"This is very sensitive. President Mobutu[364] has set up a 'pension fund' for when he retires from politics. Our target has discovered this and is trying to blackmail the president. President Mobutu cannot allow such criminal behaviour to go unpunished."

I was both astonished and amused.

People who work in Africa know that 'pension fund' is a euphemism for when corrupt politicians siphon government funds into offshore accounts as a contingency for if—or when—they ever have to flee. For most, the gravy train leaves the station with them as happy passengers as soon as they assume power.

The president of Zaire had been caught stealing state funds—probably by one of his own ministers— and was now prepared to pay to have him murdered. What's more, he regarded the minister as a criminal. It was no secret that Mobutu and his ministers had been stealing from their own people since coming into power. The target must have had a powerful hold over Mobutu to pose such a threat.

"Well, David," I said, "I'm afraid we don't undertake political assassinations. We are available to assist governments who need our services and expertise, but we don't see ourselves as an extension of political intrigue in any country. We also operate according to a strict code of conduct. So I'm afraid I shall have to turn down your proposition."

It was obvious that David was bitterly disappointed. I could see his mind racing as he considered what the implications would be if I decided to expose his government's plans. He kept his angry hooded eyes on me as he slowly inched his hand towards his briefcase.

"I wouldn't advise you to try anything stupid," I told him. "You'll be dead long before you get to that pistol in your briefcase. I really don't want to shoot you, but I will if I have to. I think we should both just leave the hotel and act as though nothing happened. I won't discuss our meeting with anyone and I don't believe you will either. If you decide to take this further, however, I have recorded our conversation and I'll broadcast it to the world. That's not a threat—it's a promise. I'm going to leave the room first—give me ten minutes, then follow me out and make your way back to your embassy. My men will watch us leave. I don't think we'll ever meet again."

In the lobby of the hotel, I called my team and asked them to return my car. They were there within twenty minutes. As I entered the Sandton shopping mall, one of my men was waiting for me. When he saw me, he turned around and started walking off as I shadowed him into the car park.

"The coast is clear," he said with a grin as he handed me my car keys. "Here's the parking receipt. It's already paid for—you owe me five Rand."

I told him I would add it to his salary. I never heard from 'David' again.

Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko despatched his 'diplomatic messenger', 'David', to convince EO to carry out an assassination (photo: Agence France-Presse)

36:
Rescue in Irian Jaya

I had already deleted 'David' from my mind and was mentally preparing for a call from the mysterious Zahir. I called Nico and asked him to get the boardroom 'prepared and ready' for a meeting. He would start the covert video and tape recorder as soon as I signalled him to switch them on.

At the Atterbury Road off-ramp in Pretoria, exactly three hours after I had ended my call with Zahir, my phone rang. I was impressed by his punctuality.

"Mr Barlow—this is Zahir. Are we still meeting today?" "Yes," I said, "do you know where our offices are?" "Yes, I'll be there in 30 minutes."

Zahir arrived on time.

Nico met him at the gate and escorted him to the boardroom. With formalities out of the way, Zahir told me his story over a cup of coffee.

"I represent a very important man from the Indonesian Special Forces. I will call him 'Mister Pedro'. He is in Singapore and he has business to discuss with you. A situation has developed in his country and the West is putting pressure on him to resolve it. He has exhausted all other options—including the United Nations—you are his last resort." "Who is this Mister Pedro and why does he want to see me in Singapore? If he is such an important man, surely he could have contacted me directly?"

"To do that, he would have had to come to South Africa. He has done his homework; he is aware that certain people in the South African government aren't happy with your company. He has also heard that your Military Intelligence has targeted you because you are helping to stop certain terrorist movements. If he is seen with you, it might attract unwanted attention and cause problems for his country. That's why he wants to meet you on neutral ground."

The author was asked to travel to Singapore to meet the mysterious 'Mr Pedro' (photo: PWC)

Zahir's brief explanation made sense to me.

"This is a new way of dealing for us," I said. "How do I know your Mister Pedro isn't a drug lord or an arms smuggler…or some other type of criminal?"

"Sir, Mister Pedro is a soldier like you. He would never involve himself in wicked deeds!" exclaimed Zahir indignantly.

"Okay," I said, "let's assume I'm prepared to meet your Mister Pedro. When would he like this meeting to take place?"

"He is hoping it can be tomorrow. He is already in Singapore waiting for you. I just need to confirm a flight number with him."

"You make it sound so easy, Zahir. I just up and leave at the request of some mysterious Mister Pedro? I am intrigued even though I haven't a bloody clue what the situation is. Either way I'll have to arrange a plane ticket, book a hotel..."

"No need," he interrupted. "We have already made arrangements. We have booked you on the next Singapore Airlines flight and a reservation has been made at the Singapore Hilton. You will be contacted on the in-room phone after you have checked in. Please follow all the instructions you are given very carefully. Mister Pedro is an important man and his bodyguards can get nervous easily."

“Okay, I’ll go,” I told Zahir, “but I want you to know if this is a set-up, we will hunt you down and destroy you, your family, and even your friends.”

Zahir went to get the air tickets from his car while I briefly left the boardroom to discuss options with Nico who had been watching the discussion on the closed- circuit monitors. He looked somewhat bemused but was also concerned.

“What if this is just another ploy to get you entrapped or killed?” he asked. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I still have an old CCB contact in Singapore—

Jim—I just hope he hasn’t left for greener pastures. I’ll get him to drop me a firearm at the hotel if he can lay his hands on one. At least that way I’ll take some of them with me before they can finish me off,” I said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

Nico wasn’t convinced but he accepted my decision.

Zahir returned, gave me the tickets and US$2 000 for expenses, and left.

Nico and I sprang to work. He packed my case while I frantically phoned to arrange for a 9mm pistol to be delivered to me after I had cleared immigration and customs in Singapore. Despite it being illegal to have an unauthorised firearm in Singapore, I wasn’t about to take a chance.

Departure was in a matter of hours and there was no time to waste. Lafras informed me.

Eeben Barlow. Executive Outcomes (Kindle Location 16782). Kindle Edition.

I arrived in Singapore on 20 March 1996. While waiting to go through immigration, I switched on my cell phone and found that the international roaming facility had been activated, something Nico must have arranged. I left the terminal building and just as I was about to hail a taxi, a casually dressed oriental man sidled up to me, introduced himself as ‘Jim’s friend’, and offered to take me to the hotel. Jim must have been watching for me and sent his man to intercept me.

He ushered me into the back of a car where I found a small brown paper bag. In it was a Beretta 9mm Parabellum, twenty rounds of ammunition, and a piece of hacksaw blade. I quickly slipped them into my briefcase and made two phone calls; one to thank Jim for the present and the other to tell Nico I had arrived safely.

I muttered my thanks to the driver as I got out of the car. He immediately drove off, presumably not wanting to be caught with an armed foreigner in the vicinity of a Singapore hotel.

I suspected the mysterious Mister Pedro’s men already had me under surveillance as I walked into the lobby. Everything was arranged as Zahir had said it would be— including an early morning check-in. I signed in at the hotel’s reception, collected my key, and went to my room to inspect it for anything suspicious and to check the newly acquired pistol. I had hardly finished checking when the phone rang.

“Mister Barlow, Mister Pedro suggests you have a rest after your long flight,” a voice said. “You may order anything from room service, but under no circumstances should you leave your room. We will contact you in six hours.”

After passing me the instructions, the caller immediately terminated the conversation.

“So, they are watching me,” I thought, wondering whether they knew I had been picked up by a go-between and was armed.

Sitting at the table, I used the hacksaw blade to cut a deep cross into the tip of each round so that it would blossom open if I had to shoot anyone. Hopefully, even if I just wounded them, it would put them out of action.

I unpacked my case, had a shower, and lay down for a quick rest. I wanted to be clear-headed and fresh when I met the mysterious Mister Pedro. I dozed off with the pistol under my pillow.

At precisely 17:00 the phone rang. It was 'the voice'.

"Mister Barlow, Mister Pedro says you must order supper. He will meet you in two hours. Is that okay?"

"Fine," I replied, but he had hung up without even waiting for an answer.

At the appointed time there was a knock on the door. I retrieved my pistol and padded over to look through the peep-hole. I saw two well-built, casually-dressed oriental men.

"Who's there?" I called out, standing to one side of the door. "We are friends of Mister Pedro's."

I kept my pistol trained on them as I ushered them in. They eyed me warily and introduced themselves as Major Rachman and Captain Bambang of the Indonesian Special Forces. I beckoned them to sit on the bed. Major Rachman broke the silence. "Mister Pedro told us that if you managed to get a gun into Singapore, we shouldn't try to take it away—to show good faith." "Would you like to try and take it?" I asked.

They didn't reply immediately, but after a pause Captain Bambang smiled.

"No, sir," he said. "Mister Pedro said you would probably shoot us if we tried anything funny."

That broke the ice a little and I began to like them both. They were not afraid and had clearly been well briefed not to anger or antagonise me—orders they carried out to the letter (not easy when looking down the barrel of a gun). Both were in their late twenties, obviously fit and capable men who appeared to have faced worse dangers than I. But I was the one holding the gun, which put me in control—at least for the time being. Shortly afterwards the phone rang.

"May I answer? It's for me," said Major Rachman.

I nodded but kept my pistol trained on him while watching Captain Bambang from the corner of my eye. Rachman picked up the phone, spoke a few words in an unfamiliar language, and turned to me.

"Mister Pedro is ready to see you," he said matter-of-factly. "Can we go?"

I followed them down the hallway at a safe distance with my pistol stuck into the waistband of my trousers under my jacket. I was certain that Rachman had relayed the message that I was armed, and that they were expecting me to follow them with my pistol in hand.

'How the hell did I end up in this situation?' I asked myself.

We reached a hotel suite and Rachman rapped a quick coded knock on the door. The door was opened and we were motioned inside.

A short, well-built man got up from behind a desk and smilingly extended his right hand.

"Mister Barlow—or should I call you 'General'—we meet at last. I am Mister Pedro. I hope you won't be needing your pistol now," he smiled. "I must apologise for the dramatics but we couldn't let the world know you were visiting me. It would anger many people to know we were talking to you."

We shook hands and he gestured for me to sit in the chair facing him across the desk.

In addition to my two escorts, there were another four men in the room. That they were all armed was obvious but none of them adopted a threatening or aggressive posture. My chair was also placed in a position that allowed them to observe every move I made and I was under no illusions about having lost the advantage.

"Thank you for coming, Mister Barlow," he began. "I am Brigadier General Prabowo Subianto, commander of the Indonesian Special Forces. We are known as Kopassus[365] in the West. I have been following your company's work for some time and I believe we can use your skills. I want to keep this meeting and possible future liaisons secret. But I am rude, can I offer you coffee, a Coke, or perhaps a cigarette?" He extended a pack of cigarettes to me—I noted it was Chesterfield; the brand I smoked at that time.

General Prabowo Subianto, General Officer Commanding Indonesian Special Forces, met the author in Singapore to discuss a hostage release operation (photo: Associated Press)

He had done his homework. As I lit the cigarette I noted that he didn't smoke… unlike my own fingers, his showed no tell-tale nicotine stains.

I didn't know much about Indonesia, but I was aware that General Subianto was the son-in-law of President Suharto. He had to be speaking to me with the president's blessing. I wondered if he had any surprises up his sleeve.

"Before I discuss anything with you," the general said, "I must ask if you would be prepared to accept a project from a Muslim country? Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world and if you have a problem with that I would like you to tell me. I

know only too well how countries in the West perceive us, so if you think you cannot work with us, just say so. I will be disappointed, but we certainly won't harm you if you decide to walk away from us."

"No, sir," I replied, "I have no problem working with you as long as the project is legitimate and government-sanctioned, and we are not being used to further some obscure political aim."

The general nodded and smiled.

"Indonesia consists of a great number of islands. Your country's history and ours are closely interwoven in many respects. The Dutch, when they controlled Indonesia, sent a lot of our people to South Africa as slaves. A situation has developed in one of our provinces, Irian Jaya—which is shared with Papua New Guinea—we think you might be able to resolve it for us. You see, we too have terrorists. I know you have spent many years fighting such people. A terrorist group—the West prefers to call them 'freedom fighters'—has kidnapped several Europeans including British and German nationals and some others; about nineteen Indonesians. What were these Europeans doing when they were captured, you might ask? Well, they were engaged in so-called humanitarian work in the jungle. The leader of this terrorist group, who call themselves the Free Papua Movement, is Kelik Kwalik—or 'General Kelly' as he prefers to call himself. Obviously this is a self-appointed rank. Kelly has made certain demands, which include ceding Irian Jaya to Papua New Guinea—which is the other half of the island—and insists on these demands being met before he releases the hostages. You will appreciate that my government cannot just give away a part of our country to people who wish to further their political agenda by engaging in criminal and terrorist acts.

"For several months the International Committee of the Red Cross of Indonesia, under the leadership of Henry Fournier, has tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to negotiate the release of the hostages. Needless to say, the West forced the intervention of the International Red Cross upon us. Given our position in the world political game, you can understand that my government is under enormous pressure to ensure a speedy and safe release of the foreign hostages. It's also my government's wish that none of them are harmed."

"I understand your predicament, sir, but surely the Brits or the Yanks will help you? They are supposed to be your allies—until the time comes when they decide they no longer need you," I said with a hint of sarcasm.

General Subianto smiled.

"I forgot—you are familiar with the way these people play the game of politics. They have tried to rescue the hostages, as have we, but without success. The British police came here, as did their SAS, the US Special Forces, and many other agencies. They have all failed. The terrorists have evaded us each time we went looking for them. Since then the world has been calling on us to 'negotiate' with Kelly and his gang but I am not the sort who sits down and talks to terrorists. The West seems to think that you can meet such people over a cup of tea and with a few friendly words resolve the problems and recover the hostages. Perhaps the time will come when the West learns what it is really like

dealing with terrorists. Then perhaps they will adopt a different approach. I only hope for their sakes that they will not end up learning the hard way with many lives being lost."

He paused and looked me in the eyes.

"Do you think you can help us to free these hostages?" he asked.

My mind raced as I considered the situation: the hostages, the equipment needed, world opinion, the media, and the possible casualties. I answered him a few seconds later.

"Yes, sir, I think we can do it."

"Good, Mister Barlow," he smiled. "Let's meet in another four hours' time and you can then tell me how you propose to do it and what it will cost. Of course, you realise that we cannot afford to let the world know about your involvement in this operation."

With that, our meeting was terminated for the time being.

As I rose from my chair, Rachman and Bambang stepped forward to accompany me to the door—and to my room.

"See you soon, Mister Barlow," Rachman grinned as they departed.

I lit a cigarette and pondered the problem. I was certain we could pull off the operation; I had some of the best men around to do it. But making a workable hostage-release appreciation would require more than four hours. Nevertheless, I planned a broad and basic operation and quickly calculated our requirements for implementation. At the back of my mind was the fact that Executive Outcomes was already viewed as a 'rogue' company—how would the world react to us being in Indonesia helping to rescue hostages? Even worse, what would the fallout be if we failed? The media pressure would be pretty tough for us.

'But fuck them,' I thought, and made my decision.

I phoned Nico to tell him everything was okay and that I would be discussing a possible contract with Lafras and Duncan Rykaart. Duncan, a former Special Forces operator, had been involved in training hostage-release teams for similar operations in South Africa. He was the right man to lead the mission if we were contracted to go ahead.

I phoned Lafras and told him to get hold of Duncan and put him on standby for a call. I briefly explained what had transpired and told him that if we were successful, it might open the door for more work in the Far East.

My conversation with Duncan was brief and to the point. Did we have the talent available to put together a hostage-release team at short notice?

"No problem," he responded. "That'll be easy."

I tasked him to compile a list of the manpower he would need as well as his operational requirements. All I could tell him about the location was that it was a

Members of the Free Papua Movement (photo: Jake Hanrahan)

jungle hideout. I arranged to call him back for his input three hours later. While Duncan and Lafras were calculating requirements, I considered how the operation could be executed.

Although this was the perfect scenario for EO's involvement—if it succeeded—we couldn't allow the hostages to see that we weren't Indonesians. The implication of this was that we would require Indonesian Special Forces uniforms and weapons, and most likely have to wear balaclavas to disguise our European and African features. We would also need some Indonesian Special Forces members to act as guides and interpreters.

When my men arrived in Indonesia we would need to conduct marrying-up drills and conduct joint training and rehearsals with the Kopassus operators tasked to work with us. The planning and execution of the final operation would have to be conducted under our control, with secondary control being given to the Indonesian Special Forces.

Three hours later I called Duncan back. He was ready and able to give me what I required. Our latest contract would now depend on whether General Subianto accepted my plan.

With half an hour to spare I was ready for my next meeting with the general. Major Rachman arrived on time and escorted me back to Subianto's suite. He and his men were waiting expectantly to hear what I had to say. "General, here is my plan..."

Firstly, I discussed the manpower I thought we would need to accomplish the mission. My men were trained for this type of operation but we were unfamiliar with the terrain, the customs, and the language.

"It will be necessary for us to have some of your men with us, General. We will need guides, interpreters, and signallers for the rear link. I believe we should allow sufficient time for my men to come to Indonesia and meet with the men you allocate for the operation. Then we can do successful marrying-up drills and start joint training and rehearsals to effect the release operation. Also, we will need to build a really good intelligence picture to confirm all aspects of the mission."

"So, you want some of my men to come along with you?"

"Yes, sir. It's very important. It will ensure that if there are prisoners they can be interrogated on the battlefield. They will also be needed to help the hostages after they have been released. My men would compromise things because they would immediately be recognised as foreigners. If there are casualties—either amongst my men or the hostages—your men can provide immediate medical aid. I believe all air movements should be coordinated by your men. That will give us greater flexibility once we are on the ground".

"It makes perfect sense," the general said. "We will have a composite hostage- rescue team wearing our uniforms and carrying our weapons?"

"Correct, sir. We cannot fly into Indonesia with weapons. Besides, the weapons we do have belong to the governments we are contracted to. They won't take kindly to us suddenly disappearing with their equipment."

I briefly sketched details of how I foresaw the operation unfolding on the back of my cigarette packet. The operation would hinge on surprise. It would take the form of an aggressive, rapid heliborne assault into the target area where the terrorists were known to be hiding. The jungle canopy would prevent the helicopters from doing a ground insertion which meant the men would have to fast-rope through the jungle canopy and be ready for action the moment they hit the ground.

"Identifying the terrorists once we are on the ground will be difficult. I believe that anyone carrying a weapon should be shot, irrespective of age or sex; besides, a hostage carrying a weapon is no longer a hostage."

The general and his officers listened intently without interruption. I explained our predicament in terms of world opinion and asked to be kept out of the media spotlight if we were awarded the contract.

"Do you really think you can do it—successfully?" the general asked. "I think we can, sir," I responded.

"What if you shoot any of the hostages? The Europeans will be easy to identify, but the majority are local."

"Once we are on the ground the hostages will be able to assist in identifying friend from foe. I know it is a calculated risk, but their lives become more endangered with each passing day. I am also concerned that the longer they remain with the hostage- takers, the more they might begin to feel an affinity with them—something known as Stockholm syndrome.[366] We will have to make a judgement call at some stage".

"Good," he said, "I will want you in and out of Indonesia as fast as possible."

I jotted the phases of the proposed operation onto the back of my cigarette pack and told the general that each one would become a yardstick by which progress could be measured. In essence, Phase 1 would be the preparation of my team in South Africa; Phase 2 would be their move to Indonesia; Phase 3 would be marrying- up drills, training, and rehearsals with his men; and Phase 4 would be the execution of the mission. Phase 5 would be the team's departure back to South Africa. Finally, I gave him a figure that would cover our fee and expenses.

"Good," he said with a smile, "give me your bank details and I will arrange to transfer the money to your account immediately. I would like to see you in Jakarta in seven days and your advance team should be there in two weeks' time. You and I will need to confirm details and equipment before they get to Indonesia, as well as cover some other issues."

After brief farewells I was escorted back to my room. By then it was 04:30 Singapore time.

At sunrise I called Jim. I needed to hand the pistol back to him. He told me to put it in a bag; someone would collect it from my room within the hour. I wiped it to remove my fingerprints and wrapped it in toilet paper before putting it in a hotel laundry bag.

An hour later the man who had given me a lift from the airport knocked on my door. I handed him the hotel laundry bag which he took without a word and left. Later that evening I boarded the long flight back to South Africa.

Nico was waiting for me at the airport and he spent several minutes briefing me on what had occurred during the two days I had been absent. Apart from the media's relentless and sustained campaign against EO, there was nothing dramatic that required my urgent attention.

We were hardly back in the office when Duncan, Lafras, and Nic van den Bergh arrived for a briefing. Lafras and I agreed that while Duncan would be team leader for the operation, Nic would act as the team coordinator and interface with the Indonesian Special Forces command echelon. They were both excited by the prospect of the pending operation, which they regarded as a welcome respite from Angola and Sierra Leone.

I outlined the basic plan I had given General Subianto and said that once Nic and Duncan were on the ground and had a more comprehensive intelligence picture, the decision to change the plan would be their prerogative. After some discussion they left to assemble the team.

The next day, to my satisfaction, the bank called to say that a large sum of money had been transferred into our account from a bank in Jakarta and was awaiting clearance by the Reserve Bank. A few days later, the funds were credited to our account.

I codenamed the hostage-release Operation Excalibur. All correspondence between us and the Indonesians would be grouped under this name and classified 'secret'.

A few days later, an agent I was controlling in Military Intelligence told me they were concerned about an operation they had heard we were planning. Their information was that it would be taking place in a jungle somewhere and had been given the codename Excalibur. They knew nothing else about the operation or whose behalf we would be acting on, but they had already discussed the matter with the South African Police.

"Must I tell them anything?" he asked.

"Hell, yes, why not? Tell them you heard an EO employee saying that we are going to invade Rwanda and Burundi simultaneously. That should keep them chasing their tails around and wasting even more taxpayers' money for a while."

Little did I realise how quickly that flippant and sarcastic comment would be snapped up and fed to the media.[367]

In the coming days, there was a flurry of facsimile messages and phone calls between General Subianto and myself as we made the arrangements for my visit to Indonesia. With all hastily made plans, something invariably goes wrong, and the seven days we had agreed on soon passed as the Indonesian embassy was slow in providing me with a visa. In the end the general suggested I fly to Jakarta without bothering with a visa; his men would 'take care of those issues' when I got there.

I arrived at Jakarta Airport on 2 April, 1996.

I was met by Captain Bambang who escorted me through immigration and customs without my passport being stamped or my luggage checked. He assured me I wouldn't be bothered by the airport officials on the way out either. As we walked out of the terminal building, he told me animatedly that there was great excitement in Special Forces about us coming to work with them and assisting in releasing the hostages. They had been reading up on EO and the disinformation touted in the media had given us a reputation that impressed them rather more than it did us.

"A deceptive and dirty pen can break a clean sword," I said.

Bambang, of course, didn't catch my sarcasm or the animosity I felt towards the journalists who had become opinion-shapers on EO, and who apparently knew more about the company than any of us did. But, of course, several of them were also willingly acting as conduits for DFA and MI's lies and deceit.

He drove me to a remote corner of the airport where we boarded an Air Force Bell helicopter. After a 30-minute flight we descended into a jungle clearing where there was an old plantation-style house that would be my home until General Subianto— who was at that time in Irian Jaya—arrived. This would give me time to rest, re-think our strategy, and ensure I had all bases covered. Captain Bambang would be staying with me as my minder. A young soldier—who happened to be named 'Hitler'—was on hand to cook my meals and make sure I was comfortable. A section of soldiers patrolled the area at night so I would sleep safely and well.

I realised I had been taken out of the public eye and placed in a friendly prison where I could speak to no one except Bambang. I just had to relax and await developments. When General Subianto arrived the following day, we covered all aspects of the operation and war-gamed it out to cover all the options including contingencies. We discussed what information would be made available to the media if the operation was successful. We also discussed Indonesia in general, and other areas of cooperation that could be looked at in the future.

Although General Subianto seemed enthusiastic about the pending operation, I was certain that he was still a bit apprehensive about how we intended it to unfold. The stakes were high for him: not only was he the president's son-in-law, he was also the Commander of the Indonesian Special Forces. Failure would probably spell a rapid end to his career— not to mention the probable impact on his private life.

We completed our planning in the jungle and I was flown back to Jakarta and booked into the Holiday Inn. There were a few days to kill so Bambang continued to act as my minder, collecting me each morning and showing me the sights around the capital.

Author with an Indonesian Special Forces officer in Jakarta before the hostage release operation

Nic, Duncan, and the advance party arrived a few days later and were also checked into the Holiday Inn.

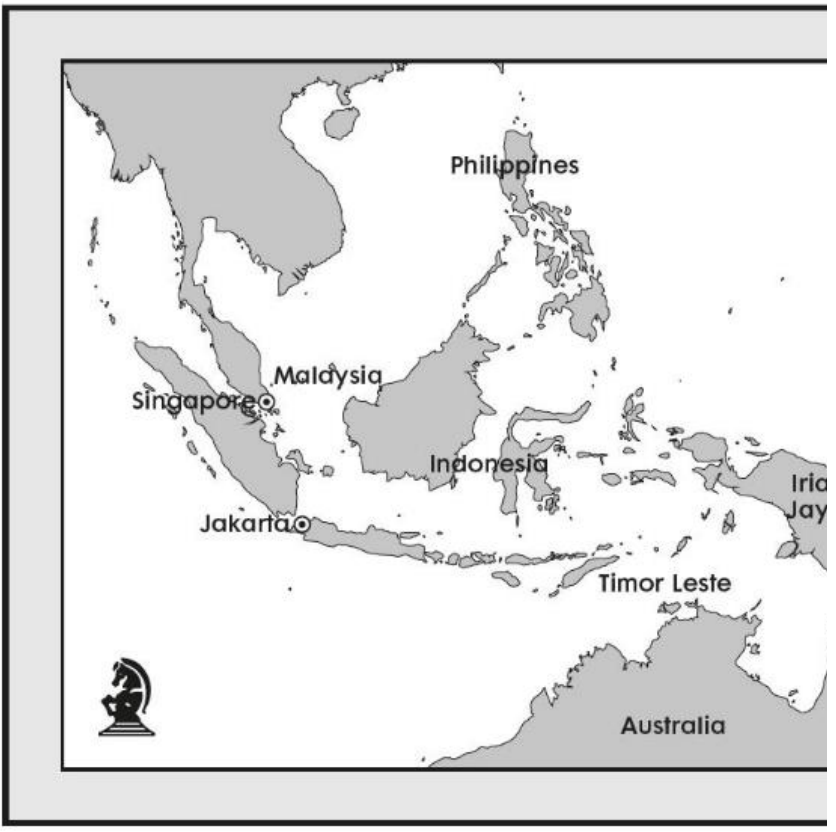
Duncan and I again went through the plan, our communications links, and the emergency procedures that would be followed if problems developed.

I introduced my men to General Subianto the following day. He seemed to like the look of them and later told me that they had been exactly the way he had imagined them.

The next day I said goodbye to the team, wished them luck, and flew out of Indonesia. I knew the operation was in good hands.

For several weeks Duncan and his team worked at producing a cohesive joint EO-Kopassus team capable of conducting the hostage release. Nic's regular sitreps to the office in Pretoria were very encouraging.

However, during one of the dress rehearsals conducted in bad weather, a helicopter crashed, killing the crew and several Kopassus members. Fortunately, Duncan and his team had been flying in a different helicopter. This incident, although regrettable, didn't really set the timetable back. It did, though, focus the men's minds and remind them that they were entering an unpredictable, dangerous and hostile environment.



Irian Jaya, the island where the hostages were held by the FPM. A joint E
secured their release after a daring operation

Gradually the hostage-release team finalised preparations and were soon only waiting for a window in the weather over Irian Jaya to launch the operation. Eventually the meteorological teams gave a date that looked favourable. This was a signal for my men to enjoy their last night before the operation and by all accounts they did.

On 9 May 1996, a helicopter-borne assault swooped across the jungle canopies of Irian Jaya to release the hostages. Duncan and his team, working as one alongside the Indonesian Special Forces troops, snaked out their long ropes and crashed through the thick jungle canopy and on to the jungle floor.

They soon stumbled across Anna McIvor, one of the British hostages. Almost immediately after that, they ran into several terrorists who tried to stand their ground and put up a fight. The ensuing gun battle lasted almost six-and-a-half hours, but 'General Kelly's' disciples were no match for a group of highly trained and well-armed men. Duncan and his team systematically cleared a path through the jungle and slowly gathered all the hostages they could find.

The terrorists who hadn't been killed or wounded in the fighting eventually broke rank and fled in panic, leaving several of their dead or wounded comrades behind. The jungle terrain made the follow-up operation difficult (particularly while a desperate gun battle raged around them) but Duncan and his team persevered and killed several more fleeing terrorists.

Because Kelly's men had been taken by complete surprise, they only managed to kill one of the hostages—an Indonesian who was struck down by a machete blow—a death that our men were unable to prevent.

My men, all wearing balaclavas, were not recognised as non-Indonesians by the hostages. I was in London negotiating another a potential contract when news broke of the hostage rescue in Irian Jaya. I was absolutely thrilled about the success of the operation; even more so because the joint EO-Kopassus team had suffered no casualties.

I had to laugh that morning when I heard a UK radio station reporting (with great fanfare) the 'highly successful and daring SAS operation to release hostages in Irian Jaya'.

If only the truth could be told, I thought.

When General Prabowo Subianto announced to the world media that the hostages had at last been rescued, we all felt proud of our role in the operation. Duncan and his men had achieved something that several other foreign forces had been unable to.

The Evening Standard of 22 May 1996 ran the banner headline: 'Fleet Street's SAS heroes'. The Express also had no doubts about which force had rescued four Britons from their Indonesian captors, and boldly proclaimed: 'SAS in kidnap rescue drama'.

As one journalist reported:

> I phoned the Ministry of Defence press office. Were the SAS involved in Indonesia? The spokeswoman laughed. She couldn't confirm it or deny it. The Foreign Office took the same line. In any other circumstances that formula is one that allows a journalist to talk about rumours, or suspicions, or hints, but the deal with the SAS is that they never confirm or deny anything.

There was widespread international praise for the manner in which Kopassus— and by inference, their Western allies—had conducted the operation and rescued the hostages, one of whom was a UN member. Several Western armies were equally quick and happy to claim some of the credit by issuing 'no comment, nudge-nudge, winkwink' responses.

General Subianto and his men. EO worked alongside Kopassus to release the hostages on Irian Jaya (photo: unknown)

The praise soon turned to anger and condemnation when it became known that EO had been part of the operation. It seemed everyone was fine with foreign nationals being rescued by Western forces, but the thought of EO having been the prime player was just too awful to contemplate.

The accusations came thick and fast, among others, that we had been involved in an attack on a nearby village and murdered the inhabitants. I was shocked but not too surprised by the blatant lies the media generated. Had I been aware of any such action, I would immediately have withdrawn from our contract. In the event, I'd had no reason to do so.

The hostages only learnt later that their saviours had been the 'rogue and racist dogs of war' from Executive Outcomes. Some even expressed disgust about having been rescued by us.

In an attempt to vilify the company, new 'information' began appearing. The authors no doubt had their own agendas to serve and we could only pity them.

In January 2000 Internet journalist Peter Cronau wrote:

In West Papua in January 1996, guerrilla soldiers of the OPM (Free Papua Movement), led by Kelly Kwalik, had kidnapped British, Dutch, German, and Indonesian hostages to attract international publicity to their independence campaign. The kidnapping occurred in the highlands of West Papua where indigenous communities have been disrupted by the huge Freeport McMoRan copper and gold mine which is partly owned by Rio Tinto, the owner of the Bougainville mine. The Kopassos troops, trained and advised by Executive Outcomes, were responsible for a deadly helicopter assault on the West Papuan village of Geselema on May 9, 1996, in which many civilians were murdered and numerous others wounded. This was the start of an Indonesian retribution campaign aimed at capturing the OPM responsible and punishing the local civilian population. These actions took

place over several months and reportedly led to the deaths of hundreds of West Papuans displaced from their lands by the military operation.

The British Military Attaché to Indonesia and ex-SAS veteran, Colonel Ivor Helberg, who had provided specialised assistance and advice to General Subianto during the early stages of the hostage crisis, would later imply that it would have been unthinkable for a foreign third party or 'mercenary force' to have executed 'the kind of operation on our behalf', clearly implying that the British had conducted the rescue operation.

As EO's involvement became more widely known, so too did the criticism levelled against us escalate. We were accused of everything from having destabilised Indonesia to murdering innocent civilians. We could only turn our faces to the wind and continue what we were doing. Our skins were becoming quite thick by then.

General Subianto believed that the hostage-release operation had indeed broken the back of the Free Papua Movement, at least in the short to medium term. He also reassured me that the negative stories the media had written about us had no effect on his respect for us.

"I will understand if you feel us to be an embarrassment to your government, General," I told him one day in July 1996.

"You helped us when no one else could or would—and we never forget our friends. You may stay in Indonesia for as long as you want. Besides, I have some other ideas I would like to discuss with you," he remarked.

I had to leave Indonesia for an urgent meeting with another potential client, so I asked him to discuss those issues with Nic van den Bergh and Duncan Rykaard, who by then were well accepted by the general and his staff. I knew they would use Lafras as a sounding board if I wasn't there and they knew I had full confidence in them.

Our new found friendship with the Indonesian Special Forces led to greater collaboration with them. In turn, we came to be regarded as their 'South African brothers'.

General Prubowo Subianto, the commander of Kopassus, became a national hero after the successful hostage release operation in Irian Jaya

Several of our men remained in Indonesia to continue with the new agreements that were crafted. Our tasks would include:

- Project Sentinel: The establishment of a Special Operations 'black'[368] detachment whose aim was to infiltrate the jungles and gather combat intelligence on terrorist groups.
- Project K-9: The deployment of an EOD/IED (explosive ordnance disposal/ improvised explosive devices) team tasked to counter any bombing threats by separatists, terrorists, and radical elements in Indonesia.
- Project K-9 (2): The establishment of a Specialist Warfare Dog School to aid in tracking and search-and-rescue as well as locating explosives for the EODs/IEDs.
- Project Discovery: The establishment of an airborne detection and deployment team to counter maritime piracy—a major problem along the vast stretches of unguarded coastline fringing Indonesia's islands.
- Project Garsec: A security programme aimed at ensuring stability within the region.
- Project Nemesis: A 'black operations' team to conduct highly sensitive and specialised covert operations.

General Subianto called me one day and asked us to investigate a shooting incident at the Tamika Airfield in Irian Jaya where 2nd Lieutenant Sanurib, an officer attached to the Kopassus, had shot and killed fifteen soldiers and civilians— including the commander of Kopassus' elite counter-terrorist unit, Detachment 81. There was speculation about Sanurib having acted on behalf of one of the groups intent on causing problems in the

province, and it was thought that he might be part of a terrorist cell that had infiltrated the Indonesian Army.

We immediately dispatched a polygraph team from Orion Professional Management (Pty) Ltd, (a company we partly owned in Pretoria) which focussed on physical security and investigations related mainly to criminal activities and industrial espionage. The team, headed by ex-SAP General Dries van der Merwe, travelled to Jakarta and interviewed Sanurib. Their findings and recommendations were accepted in total by the Indonesian Special Forces and implemented as a standing operational procedure for the future.

Some of our men were still engaged in several of the projects we had been contracted to carry out when I eventually resigned as chairman of Executive Outcomes and its associated companies.

In later years, media reports on the instability, government corruption, and deteriorating political situation in Indonesia, saddened me. Some reports said killings were taking place every day—all attributed to the Indonesian military. Of course (according to the media) EO was still to blame for such atrocities because (according to their misleading reports) we had apparently trained the entire Indonesian Army. Knowing them as I did, I found it difficult to accept the validity of many of the alleged atrocities that were laid at the feet of General Subianto and his men.

I will never forget the friendliness, hospitality and openness of all the Indonesian people we dealt with. Despite being non-Muslims or 'unbelievers' we were always welcomed, and treated with respect by everyone—except those who fired at us in anger.

I still miss my political and military discussions with General Subianto.

Free Papua Movement leader, Kelly Kwalik, was killed in an operation in 2009 (Photo AFP)

37:

Executive Outcomes: The Great Lakes Myth

The area known as the Great Lakes Region encompasses Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, eastern Zaire, and western Tanzania. Rwanda and Burundi had, for many years, been ravaged by internal conflicts, which culminated in the mass genocide of 1994. The seeds of the area's bloody history were sown in 1962 when Rwanda established its independence from Belgium and appointed a president from the Hutu tribe. That same year, the United Nations trust territory of Ruanda-Urundi in east- central Africa was divided into the independent nations of Rwanda and Burundi.

During October 1990, disaffected members of the Tutsi tribe, living in exile in Uganda, invaded Rwanda. Known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), they intended to replace the 18-year old Hutu regime of President Juvenal Habyarimana. A young officer by the name of Paul Kagame returned from his studies in the US (where he had attended the US Army Command and General Staff College) in order to lead the RPF. At Habyarimana's request, France sent troops to help block the RPF force that was spilling over the border.

For the following three years, French troops, despatched by their government, actively supported the Rwandan government in halting the RPF.

In 1991, they were joined by Kabangu Kalunga, an intelligence officer despatched by Zaire's US-backed President Mobuto—who had instructions to aid the Hutus in their fight against the Tutsis. Zaire, backing the forces of President Juvenal Habyarimana, was also contemplating providing covert support to Kagame's RPF. This would have enabled Mobutu to secure his interests—and those of the US— regardless of the outcome of the conflict.

I found it deeply ironic that the US and the French—old allies—were allegedly supporting opposing forces in the looming conflict. We had very credible intelligence that a horrific situation was developing, and that if it was not stopped, it would result in an extremely bloody and murderous civil war between Hutu's and Tutsi's.

South Africa was also very keen to get involved; the war was a perfect opportunity to make money through its arms industry and increase its sphere of influence.

On 25 January 1993, The Argus reported that South Africa had indeed been supplying arms and ammunition to Rwanda.

An article titled 'SA, Egypt sold weapons to Rwanda', claimed:

> Egypt and South Africa secretly supplied nearly $12 million (R40.8 million) in arms to Rwanda after 1990, which helped fuel the country's ethnic civil war, Human Rights Watch said today..... South Africa, in defiance of a United Nations resolution, supplied $5.9 million (R20.6 million) in weapons [to the Rwandan government].

The Weekly Mail of 5 March 1993 followed with a similar report under the headline, 'Millions in SA arms fuel bitter civil war'.

South Africa was, as usual, very quick to deny any involvement, especially relating to the supply of rifles and rifle grenades to a state guilty of persecuting minority groups within the country, and this 'support-and-denial' approach later continued under President Nelson Mandela's ANC-led government. Credible rumours doing the rounds at that time indicated that MI's DST was also actively involved in training some of the pro-government Hutu groups—but ultimately, the blame would be laid at our door.

A very shaky power-sharing agreement was reached between Hutus and Tutsis on 4 August 1993, but it was seen as a betrayal by the extremist leaders of the Hutu majority, and discontent (fuelled by political and economic interests) began to escalate.

On 6 April 1994, the presidents of both Rwanda and Burundi were killed in a mysterious plane crash near Rwanda's capital.[369] They had been in Tanzania trying to resolve the looming crisis before it got out of hand. The incident prodded the Hutu-dominated Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) into launching a genocide of Tutsis which eventually left close to a million bodies in its wake.

At around this time, I was quizzed by a South African journalist (I cannot recall his name) who insistently implied that Executive Outcomes may have had something to do with the crash. The media continually singled us out for all the problems in Africa. By then, I firmly believed that we were being used as a convenient scapegoat to shield the parties involved in—and indeed encouraging—the looming disaster.

Civil war erupted the day after the two presidents were killed.

The first victims were Agathe Uwilingiyimana (the prime minister of Rwanda) and Joseph Kavaruganda, (the president of the Supreme Court) who were killed while being escorted to a place of safety by ten Belgian peacekeepers who were subsequently also slaughtered. The Rwandan prime minister was violently raped before she was murdered. The remaining Belgian peacekeepers fled Rwanda as fast as they could.

Rwanda then turned into a horror show, the likes of which the world had seldom seen.

On 4 May 1998 the Pioneer Press published an article originating from the Associated Press, headlined 'Kofi Annan was aware of Tutsis' peril: Canadian peacekeeper ordered not to intervene in 1994 when bloodbath appeared imminent'.

The article delivered a damning indictment of Kofi Annan and his UN Peacekeeping cronies:

Kofi Annan knew about the Rwandan government's plans to exterminate minority Tutsis and his office ordered UN peacekeepers not to intervene, the New Yorker magazine reported today. While the world body has admitted that mistakes were made, UN officials have blocked attempts to determine who was directly involved in the decision not to act. A copy of a fax from UN Headquarters, obtained by the New Yorker, showed that the order not to intervene was from Annan now the UN secretary-general.

The Rwandan genocide erupted 6 April 1994. When it was over three months later, Hutu extremists had killed 500 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. French, Belgian, and US officials have denied they had any warning of a government orchestrated massacre.

Despite having been warned of the pending slaughter in Rwanda, Kofi Annan sat on his hands and did nothing (photo: Breaking Times)

Annan, on a tour of Africa, was not available for comment, but was expected to apologise to the Rwandan people for the slow response of the international community during a visit to Kigali on Wednesday, a spokesman said.

Annan was the head of UN peacekeeping operations on 11 January 1994, when the commander of UN forces in Rwanda, Major General Roméo Dallaire,[370] warned the world body that the Kigali government was planning to slaughter Tutsis and said he was making plans to confiscate weapons. Dallaire, a Canadian, was in charge of 450 UN peacekeepers in the Rwandan capital.

In the fax sent to UN Headquarters in New York, Dallaire quoted a senior Rwandan security official as saying he had been ordered to register all Tutsis in Kigali for the purpose, he suspected, of 'their extermination'.

Annan's office ordered Dallaire to neither protect the informant nor confiscate the arms. Annan was aware of the order, said his aide, Iqbal Riza, who signed the response. 'I was responsible', Riza, who is still Annan's deputy, told the New Yorker when shown a copy of the order. 'This is not to say that Mr Annan was oblivious of what was going on. No. Part of my responsibility was to keep him informed.'

Canadian Major General Roméo Dallaire, commander of the UN forces in Rwanda, warned of the looming disaster. No one listened (photo: Legion Magazine)

Annan has blocked probes to determine who saw the fax that ordered the Canadian commander to abandon his plan to intervene.

In a letter to the Belgian government last year, Annan refused to let Dallaire testify before a Belgian panel investigating the events in Rwanda because he did not believe it was 'in the interest of the organisation'.

The UN was apparently using the same peacekeeping strategy for Rwanda as it had for Angola and Sierra Leone—formulate new resolutions, write reports, make a lot of noise, drink tea, watch the slaughter, run away if things get dangerous, prevent anyone from criticising the organisation, spend as much money as possible, and in the process, do as little as possible—preferably nothing.

But, perhaps the UN was about to prove me wrong…

On or about 12 April, I received an urgent call from a French speaking Geneva- based UN representative who pleadingly asked whether Executive Outcomes would be willing and able to stop the genocide in Rwanda. He added that, should the UN approve our plan, EO would be required to provide all the equipment it needed. I undertook to get back to him within 24 hours.

Word of my telephone discussion was immediately relayed to Nic van den Bergh who had, by then, already taken note of the developing situation and commissioned several of our men to look for a way in which to intervene and stop the horror.

They promptly responded to my question: 'Yes, we can help if the UN asks us to go in.'

Nic and Chris Grové, another senior EO officer, discussed the broad concept intervention strategy with me the following morning. Appreciating that time was of the essence, they had spent the better part of the night preparing their Rwandan rescue mission.

In brief, their strategy determined that:

- We would require a well-equipped, composite airmobile force of approximately 1 500 men.
- We could stabilise the country within 180 days, after which we would hand over to a competent UN-approved force.
- The total cost for EO's services would be US$100 million for a six-month period (this figure included the procurement of all equipment including the air assets we required, all of which would be handed over to the UN upon our departure. If the UN undertook to provide the required equipment prior to our deployment, the figure would be substantially reduced).

The broad intervention concept made provision for a four-phase operation. These phases were presented to me as follows:

Phase 1: The Operational Planning Cycle which would require approximately two weeks to finalise.

Phase 2: The mobilisation and deployment of the force into Rwanda. Phase 3: The execution of the mission and stabilisation of the country. Phase 4: The demobilisation of our force.

Every aspect of each phase was presented in detail to allow me to correctly brief the UN representative who had asked for our assistance.

I phoned him the following day and told him that we would be able to assist in Rwanda if formally asked to do so. I spelt out our time-frame, force-level, predicted costs, and the deployment and execution of the operation, and sent him a synopsis of our proposed intervention strategy plus a concept of operations. He undertook to get back to me within 24 hours after discussing the matter with his colleagues.

He promptly called back the following morning and told me that the UN was unable to use Executive Outcomes; we were 'too expensive'.

Paying EO to stop the slaughter from taking place was deemed too expensive (photo: Dave Blume)

I didn't believe that our costs had anything to do with the rejection of our concept intervention strategy. Instead, I suspected the UN wanted the warring parties to destroy themselves before they would consider deploying a peacekeeping force. Such a plan would reduce UN casualties. It would also be easier to contain two war-weary parties.

With that our brief involvement with Rwanda was over—for the moment.

The US, ever quick to intervene, launched Operation Distant Runner on 12 April, followed by Operation Support Hope a few days later. The first US troops arrived in the Rwandan capital, Kigali on 30 July[371] with the aim of securing the airport to allow for an expanded international relief effort.

Both US operations ended in September 1994 having cost US$147.8 million. The results were minimal in terms of bringing about any peace or an end to the slaughter. Those costs also made our US$100 million quote seem very reasonable, especially considering its inclusion of costs for the equipment we would have needed.

By late April 1994, hundreds of thousands of terrified Rwandan refugees were pouring over the border into Tanzania.

By late June, French marines and the French Foreign Legion had arrived in Rwanda to stem the slaughter. Fearing retribution, more than a million Hutus fled the country for the safety of refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania.

By July 1994, it was estimated that in little more than three months, more than a million people had been butchered in Rwanda, the majority of them Tutsis. Thousands of Tutsis who sought sanctuary in a church at Kibeho were bombed, shot, hacked, or burnt to death by Hutu soldiers and militiamen.

On 3 July 1994, the Sunday Tribune reported extensively on South Africa's role in the conflict under the headline, 'Former PW man in Rwanda arms link'. The article[372] claimed:

The South African at the centre of a controversial arms deal between Seychelles and Rwanda is a former private secretary to PW Botha,[373] Captain WPJ 'Ters' Ehlers.

The former naval officer—an associate of ex-security police spy Craig Williamson and controversial Italian businessman Mario Ricci—was named by Seychelles sources as one of the intermediaries who brokered the deal to sell $40 million worth of arms to Rwanda's beleaguered Hutu-led army.

The army, together with Hutu militias, has been blamed for the recent horrific genocide against the minority Tutsi tribe.

After fourteen weeks of carnage, Paul Kagame's RPF declared an end to the civil war and took control of Rwanda.

Paul Kagame, commanding predominantly Tutsi forces, took control of Rwanda after he had declared an end to the civil war and its accompanying genocide (photo: Al Jazeera)

In July, eleven UN peacekeepers were killed and this prompted the UN to immediately withdraw its forces from Rwanda. Their absence was scarcely noticed.

We followed the unfolding events in shocked disbelief. The UN, who had been anxious enough about getting us out of Angola, and made false promises about intending to send a UN support mission there, had stood back and watched while the slaughter went on

around them. It was the same strategy they had followed in Sierra Leone. This simply reinforced my opinion that the UN had no intention of achieving peace anywhere.

The trials (held in later years) to bring the instigators of the genocide to book were widely reported on in the media. I have often wondered why the UN was never called upon to explain its absolute lack of backbone and commitment. In my view, the UN should have been put on trial as well.

1994 and 1995 were relatively peaceful in Rwanda, but numerous murders still took place. In 1996, 62 people were killed in the Karago and Giciye villages in an operation by the now Tutsi-dominated army. As this area had been the home of the late Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana,[374] it was speculated by the army that these people were insurgents.

On 31 May 1995 The Citizen reported:

> Arms 'may have gone to Rwanda': South African-made arms could have been smuggled to Rwanda and Burundi in breach of a decision to halt weapons sales to both countries, State arms procurement agency Armscor said yesterday.

The rumours about us supposedly having been involved in the Great Lakes area finally reached the ears of the German Intelligence Service (BND). They made discreet contact with me and used a very obvious false-flag[375] to lure me to Germany.

On 5 September 1995 two very friendly German intelligence officers from the BND met me in Frankfurt and tried to persuade me to deploy EO into Rwanda. Martin Berger and Harald Boemer promised that the German government, and in particular the German Intelligence Service, would discreetly support our activities there. I declined their offer and we parted with a promise to stay in touch.

Upon arrival back in South Africa, I immediately contacted Bertie Jackson at the SASS and gave him the gist of my visit to Germany. The last thing I needed was to be entrapped by a provocation—or a new false accusation about having now morphed into a German agent. My statement was noted and left at that.

It was against the backdrop of mayhem and butchery in Rwanda that Nico and I met the Rwandan Patriotic Front leader Paul Kagame in late 1995.

He had come to South Africa to seek help in resolving some of the immense problems still being experienced in his country. He said he had held several meetings with representatives of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and found them 'rather unhelpful'. This had surprised him; he had incorrectly believed the new ANC-led government would be keen to intervene and make its mark in Africa. However, all indications pointed to South Africa actively supporting the Hutus. This was hardly surprising to me—especially as many of the old guard DFA and MI members were still firmly entrenched behind their desks, and had been instrumental in arming the Hutus before their rampage.

Kagame claimed to have been aware of our existence and our work in Angola and Sierra Leone in particular, and he was keen to coax us into going to aid the RPF. We

discussed what was happening in Rwanda over lunch at a small Italian restaurant in Waterkloof, a suburb in Pretoria.

"What are your feelings about our problems in Rwanda and the current situation there?" he asked.

"Personally, I don't think the West—or even Africa for that matter—cares much about what is really going on. Of course, as usual, there will be a lot of talk about the horrors of the genocide—the UN may even send some more peacekeepers—but they won't be able to do anything; one cannot keep peace if there is a war going on. However, if a story surfaced that someone was attempting to kill off all of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda, the world would rush in to save them. Ironic isn't it?" I responded.

"Why do you say that no one cares?" a surprised Kagame asked. "You don't have oil or diamonds," Nico replied.

"Nico is correct. As you know, South Africa has been supplying arms and ammunition, and apparently training to the Hutus, and no one has really shown any concern about that—despite the fact that the Hutus are using these arms to slaughter your people. You unfortunately do not have any natural resources that the West is interested in except water—something the world may one day go to war for. With nothing that can truly benefit them, why would they be willing to help you? All the conflicts we are seeing in Africa are exacerbated by a play for control over resources by the larger powers. Right now, they are quite happy to see you all kill one another because you don't have anything they consider to be of strategic value."[376]

"What can we do?" he asked.

"It's time we stopped asking the outside world to help us. Africa needs to resolve its own problems. That way, we will be beholden to no one. Africa is probably the richest continent on earth but sadly the conflicts are making us poor and weak. I personally think the international community does not want to see a rich and powerful Africa."

Paul Kagame visited the author in South Africa to ask for assistance and advice (photo: Newsweek)

"How are we to resolve our problems, then?" he asked.

"You and I are both soldiers. We know there can be no peace while there are armed bands of thugs roaming the countryside causing murder, terror, and mayhem. We all know that South Africa has been supplying arms and ammunition to several of these groups. In my opinion, the only way to resolve this issue is to call for a general amnesty, create safe havens for the civilians, and consider anyone who is armed and does not enter these safe havens or apply for amnesty 'the enemy'. Once you have a defined enemy, you will be able to launch a well-planned, well-coordinated, aggressive and offensive military campaign."

Nico agreed with me, as did Kagame. "And then what do we do?" he asked.

"Once you have identified and destroyed the real enemy, you can ask the UN for some form of assistance in keeping the peace but I repeat: you cannot keep peace if there is none. Nor is the UN's record too shiny as far as peacekeeping is concerned. Indeed, it reflects failure after failure."

"You seem to have the answers to our problems; would you be prepared to come and help us? Of course we would pay you well for your services. Also, we want the Americans out of Rwanda but we can't force them to leave. As you say: we need African solutions to African problems."

"No, I'm afraid we can't come and help you now. Too much water has passed under the proverbial bridge and our arrival in your country would only make matters worse for you. There is already a false rumour about Executive Outcomes being the advance guard for some form of neo-colonialism doing the rounds. You would be subjected to a massive media campaign and international pressure to get rid of us. In fact, they would probably claim we had instigated Rwanda's problems in the first place which would place you in an even more untenable position."

"Is there no way I can persuade you to at least come over and discuss this with my government?" an obviously disappointed Kagame asked.

"I am truly sorry but I think it would be better for you if we stayed out of the Great Lakes area. The company is already under major international pressure and you can do without that right now. You don't need us to compound your problems."

Kagame thanked us for our candour, asked us to stay in touch, and said he would do the same.

We were planning a large corporate function at the Gallagher Estate conference and exhibition centre in late November 1995. We invited Kagame to come along, which he did, along with his aide. It was also attended by several senior government officials—including Police Commissioner George Fivaz, prominent businessmen, representatives of the Angolan Armed Forces, delegates from Sierra Leone, ANC party officials, and many others.

By July 1996, the US Army's Special Forces were training the new Rwandan Army. There had, despite all reports to the contrary, already been claims in the media that Executive Outcomes was active in Rwanda and Burundi, and that we were supporting both the Hutus and the Tutsis. I recalled flippantly having told an MI officer that EO intended to invade both Rwanda and Burundi. He had obviously reported the remark as 'intelligence' and not as sarcasm.

We ignored these allegations, but I couldn't ignore how little the DFA, MI, or even the media, seemed to care about certain well-placed South Africans supplying arms into the conflict—or the South Africans that were providing training to anti- government forces there. Indeed, it appeared that even the UN turned a blind eye to their actions.

On 20 September 1996, and at my insistence, our attorneys wrote to the Department of Foreign Affairs—this time about a newspaper article published in the UK which had quoted the DFA's Rusty Evans as having said that Executive Outcomes 'was a dangerous criminal and destructive force in Africa'. The letter read as follows:

We are acting on behalf of Executive Outcomes, a company well known to your department.

We hereby attach a copy of the report which was published by the Independent in London on 16/9/1996. The Director General Mr Rusty Evans here referred to our clients as 'a dangerous criminal and destructive force in Africa'.

The Office of the Attorney General in Pretoria has on several occasions denied that any criminal activities were being investigated against Executive Outcomes. We would thus appreciate your answers to the following questions:

- Do you condone and agree with the viewpoint of Mr Evans as expressed in the newspaper?
- Which criminal activities are being referred to?
- In which countries did Executive Outcomes act as a 'destructive force' and what is meant by such a phrase?

We must unfortunately insist on receiving your reply on/before Friday 4 October as previous letters and invitations to visit the company and its activities were ignored by Mr Evans.

I suspected the DFA would be surprised to get the letter but I did not expect them to issue a reply anytime soon.

In the meantime, the DFA, ever anxious to formulate more lies about EO, confused their own dates and issued a new press release on 25 September 1996, claiming to have heard 'rumours' that EO was involved in Burundi. Their statement read as follows:

The Department of Foreign Affairs Wednesday said the government would act firmly to stop any involvement by the company Executive Outcomes in the Burundi conflict, should it emerge that the company was in fact involved.

In a statement, the department said it had heard 'rumours' that the company was involved in Burundi but had no hard evidence to substantiate this.

In addition, the department stressed that Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo 'had not made any statement or comment which could be construed as confirming in any way that Executive Outcomes is involved in the conflict in Burundi'.

If any information emerged indicating that Executive Outcomes 'might be active in that area', the government would 'act vigorously with all means at its disposal to stop such

actions'.

The department did not elaborate although I found it strange that press releases were now being issued on the basis of 'rumours' and not intelligence. I phoned the DFA and demanded to know where these rumours had originated. My call was eventually transferred to someone in their press office who maintained they had read about it in a Dutch newspaper.

The article they were referring to had only appeared in Holland on 26 September—a day after the DFA's erroneous press release. Clearly they had been hoping for media 'blowback'[377] but were working off a different calendar. When I pushed for an answer, the DFA representative promptly terminated the call. Clearly he knew the DFA had been caught out.

Perhaps this call spurred them to action.

On 3 October, they actually responded to Wilma Lubbe's demand in a letter signed by T E Makatu 'on behalf' of the Director General:

Receipt of your faxed letter dated 20 September 1996 is hereby acknowledged. The Angola desk received your letter only on 02 October 1996 and regrets to inform you that the Minister's appropriate response will only be available after Friday, 04 October 1996 as you insisted.

They were clearly playing for time and were obviously unsure about how to answer the questions posed. Ultimately, we never received the promised reply. After all, they could hardly admit that they had been lying all along.

At around this time, the media claimed to be in possession of a top secret British Intelligence document that had been 'leaked' to the press. According to the journalists who contacted me, the report claimed that Executive Outcomes was assisting one of the factions involved in the Rwandan genocide and that we were rushing 'troops' to the area. Although I didn't see this report, I assumed it was part of the British Intelligence disinformation document classified as 'UK Eyes Alpha'. I considered it a deliberate attempt by the British to force the South African government to close down EO so that British companies would be able to take up any contracts we were forced to terminate. This subsequently happened.

On 3 November 1995, I flew to Munich, again at the request of the German Intelligence Service, and held a brief meeting in a typical German Brauhaus. Once more I was asked if I would take EO into Rwanda with the support of the German government. As before, I declined. I was then asked if I would be prepared to pass any intelligence we had on the area through to them. I also rejected this request and again reported their approach to the SASS.

By 13 November 1996, I had no option but to issue a further press release refuting our alleged involvement in the Great Lakes area:

South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs spread disinformation in an official statement to implicate the military advisory company Executive Outcomes (EO) in the Burundi conflict.

Foreign Affairs subsequently denied knowledge of reported confirmation by the Minister Mr Alfred Nzo during a foreign trip that EO was in Burundi, and lied about the department's reason for issuing a statement. It then failed to respond to requests by EO for an explanation.

The latest attack by Foreign Affairs against EO came in the form of a recent statement in which it was announced that the government would act firmly against the company to stop any involvement 'in the Burundi conflict should it emerge that the company was in fact involved'.

When EO confronted Foreign Affairs spokesman Pieter Swanepoel, he claimed that the statement was made after his department was alerted by foreign media to a report in a Dutch newspaper.

The report quoted Minister Nzo as expressing South African concern about EO in Burundi. Swanepoel later claimed that he was not aware that Nzo had made such a statement.

However, the Dutch newspaper report which Foreign Affairs blamed for prompting it to warn of 'vigorous' action against EO, appeared only the day after the department's statement.

Two letters from EO's lawyers to Minister Nzo in which he was asked to clarify the department's public statements, have to date gone unanswered.

Renewed attempts were made at the weekend to implicate EO in strife in the Great Lakes areas of Central Africa with media inquiries and newspaper reports implying that Amnesty International believed that EO was supplying arms to warring factions and 'exporting mercenaries'.

However, Amnesty International Secretary-General Pierre Sane denied during a meeting with EO chairman Eeben Barlow on Saturday 9 November 1996 that he had made any such statements, and produced a copy of his press release which contained not a single mention of the military advisory company.

EO suspects that the relentless recent attempts to implicate the company in involvement in Central African conflicts are a deliberate tactic on behalf of a number of parties, including the Department of Foreign Affairs, to divert attention from and to avoid exposure of the real culprits responsible for training of rebel troops in the area and the illegal supply of weapons to the various warring factions.

On that same day, the prestigious military magazine, Jane's Defence Weekly, ran an article written by Talif Deen, a member of the UN HQ in New York. He had apparently been fed his news content by powerful and well-connected friends in South Africa.

In his article, Deen falsely claimed that both Angola and Sierra Leone were paying Executive Outcomes in mineral concessions; allegations notably similar to those being made by the DFA and MI. Deen was obviously advocating someone else's agenda.

Talif Deen, wearing a UN hat, used his pen to support the disinformation campaign against EO (photo: IPS)

In December 1996, the New African published an article claiming that EO was indeed active in Burundi. The article, titled, 'Arms pour into Great Lakes region' read:

There are also reports that mercenaries from the South African security company Executive Outcomes (EO) have been training the FDD (Burundi Forces for the Defence of Democracy) in the Uvira region. The bulk of the EO troops are reported to be ex-FNLA Angolan guerrillas who talk Portuguese. This language has been heard by several witnesses in the area. Survivors from the Teza tea factory massacre in July said that they heard some of the attackers speaking in Portuguese.

I immediately phoned the editor of New African and demanded to know why he had falsely accused us of being involved in Burundi, as well as stating for a fact that we had been part of the Teza tea factory massacre. He claimed his information had come from a reliable government source within South Africa's DFA whom he declined to name.

I would learn, much later, that the so-called 'EO trainers' were actually members of Military Intelligence's DST who had used our company name to cover their own activities.

This latest lie prompted me to issue another press release:

South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs are using their diplomatic missions abroad to leak disinformation to implicate EO in the Great Lakes conflict. Confirmation has now been obtained of such 'dirty tricks' operations at at least two embassies in Europe. This weekend EO established that staff of South Africa's French embassy fed the

newspaper Le Figaro with incorrect and false information to ensure a story was published blaming EO for 'mercenary activities' in the area.

This story appeared in Le Figaro over the weekend and was subsequently quoted in South African newspapers on Monday, 2 December 1996.

This followed a similar operation at the South African embassy in Holland in September this year when officials at that mission 'leaked' disinformation to a Dutch newspaper, whom Foreign Affairs subsequently blamed for causing their issuing of a statement of warning of stern action against EO. This report quoted Minister Nzo as expressing South Africa's concern about EO in Burundi. Foreign Affairs spokesman, Pieter Swanepoel later claimed that he was not aware of Minister Nzo making such a statement.

In both cases, EO, in an attempt to set the record straight, contacted foreign journalists to establish the origin of these reports and was told that they had been obtained at so-called 'confidential' briefings given by South African 'diplomatic' sources in those countries.

EO now more than ever suspects that the relentless attempts in recent times to implicate the company in involvement in Central African conflicts are a deliberate tactic on behalf of a number of parties, including the Department of Foreign Affairs, to divert attention from and to avoid exposure of the real culprits responsible for the training of rebel troops in the area and the illegal supply of weapons to the various warring factions.

I had again openly accused the DFA of blatant lies—an accusation they never even tried to deny. The media ignored my press release.

By January 1997, as our men were preparing to leave Sierra Leone, Rusty Evans of the DFA issued a blistering press release claiming that Executive Outcomes was indeed operating in the Great Lakes area. We, in turn, issued a press release refuting their claims and again calling them liars:

Executive Outcomes calls for an immediate in-depth investigation into recent allegations that the company is involved in the Great Lakes area. EO asks for this investigation to be conducted personally by the National Commissioner of Police and the Directors General of the South African Secret Service and the National Intelligence Agency.

Executive Outcomes wishes the Military Intelligence Division (MID) to be excluded from any involvement in this investigation as the company holds evidence that the MID fabricated intelligence reports in order to discredit the company.

Executive Outcomes will give its full cooperation to the agencies tasked to conduct the investigation in order to finally expose the disinformation campaign against it, a smear which was initiated by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The DFA countered with their own press release which, had it not been for the tragedies of Rwanda and Burundi, would have been laughable:

In response to news media enquiries regarding the allegations of a disinformation campaign contained in the above-mentioned press release, the Department of Foreign Affairs wishes to state that it is not involved in any so-called smear campaign against any South African company. The Department wishes to point out that it is one of the stated foreign policy objectives of the South African government to encourage and facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts between, and in, other countries. On our continent, this objective has been given particular importance and priority, in view of the fact that, as fellow Africans, we in South Africa are directly affected by conflicts elsewhere on the continent. South Africans have been experiencing the anguish of having to observe the continued suffering of our brothers and sisters in other African countries, as a result of lengthy civil wars, ethnic strife, and cross-border confrontations. In addition, our nation has also had to contend with the reality that large-scale foreign investment, which must be regarded as essential for the economic development of especially Sub-Saharan Africa, both as regards receiving sufficient foreign investment ourselves and in terms of the sustained influx of large numbers of illegal immigrants from elsewhere in the region to our country. In this context, the Department of Foreign Affairs has, on a number of occasions, expressed its concern at the activities of South African-based companies involved in activities of a para-military nature elsewhere on our continent. The Department maintains the view that these activities are not conducive to achieving peaceful solutions to the above-mentioned conflicts. In addition, other countries have frequently conveyed their own concern regarding these activities to our Government. Given also our country's recent history, the South African government is understandably sensitive about any perception or allegations of official sanction or support for what is seen as South African mercenary activity in other African countries.

For this reason, it was recently announced that steps had been taken by the South African government to introduce legislation to further impede such activity.

I couldn't believe that Evans could, again, so blatantly lie in a press release. His claims (that there was no smear campaign against us, and that he truly had an interest in 'peaceful solutions' in Africa) were indeed pathetic, especially in light of the fact that he and his friends (Sean Cleary and MI) had instigated so many of the lies about EO. If he was indeed concerned about the conflicts in Africa, why didn't he condemn his good friends— Cleary, Rindel, Ehlers, and Armscor/Denel— for having provided arms and ammunition to the rebel groups that had created terror and carnage in several African countries? Clearly he had more of a problem with Executive Outcomes going to the aid of beleaguered governments and trying to stabilise African countries than he did with supply of weapons and training to warring factions. He must have known we would expose his secret dealings with rebel groups.

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One positive outcome of Evans' continued misinformation campaign was that the Ugandan government approached us to assist them with a strategic threat analysis in 1995,

when the false allegations initially surfaced.

To get the project off the ground, Lafras despatched a small team of men to start gathering intelligence and conducting intelligence liaison in Uganda. Some of the men were placed in areas where armed attacks were being directed against commercial interests. Others worked from Kampala, the capital city. Our initial tasking quickly changed as our men started advising several Ugandan government ministers on various matters.

On numerous occasions I flew to Kampala to visit our men and meet prominent Ugandans. One of them was President Museveni's half-brother, General Kaleb Akandwanaho, also known as Salem Saleh. Taking advantage of my and Lafras' frequent contact with him, MI falsely claimed that we were aiding and abetting the Ugandans in supplying weapons to the Patriotic Front of Rwanda and to the Sudanese People's Liberation Army rebel movement.

General Kaleb Akandwanaho (Salem Saleh), President Museveni's half-brother (photo: unknown)

Chris Grové was tasked to compile the threat analysis (codenamed Project Mahem). His lengthy document, 'Strategic Threat Analysis and Strategy for the External Security Organisation of the Republic of Uganda', was dated late February 1997.

Executive Outcomes' minor involvement in Uganda generated further speculation about us having been involved in destabilising Africa, and South Africa's Special Forces despatched an undercover two-man team to Kampala to investigate and elaborate on these wild claims. Apparently, part of their mission was to whisper in the ears of the Ugandans that Executive Outcomes was conducting espionage operations against their cabinet ministers.

The Special Forces team was almost immediately identified by our men. They were promptly arrested and incarcerated, and a very embarrassed SANDF Chief, General Georg Meiring, was forced to fly to Kampala to negotiate their release.

Harry Carlse would later tell me:

After the company sent me to investigate the feasibility of a potential EO project for the Ugandan government, I was really surprised to run into two Special Forces operators (both

men I knew well) in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala. I immediately called Lafras and shared this information with him. He recommended that I speak to the Ugandans and have them arrested as they were obviously there to 'investigate' us. As an ex-Special Forces operator, I knew they were simply following orders and I didn't want them ending up in jail in Uganda.

I confronted the operators and asked who had sent them and what their specific mission was. They refused to tell me. I warned them they had already been identified by the Ugandans and suggested they get out of Uganda as quickly as possible. They ignored my warning and were arrested soon after that. It was only Georg Meiring's grovelling visit to Uganda and his pleading that finally got them released.

Not long thereafter, and on my return, Lafras warned me about a rumour that I had become the subject of a targeted killing as I had compromised the operators.

I hadn't; they had been identified elsewhere and monitored. The Special Forces community had, however, branded me a 'traitor' and were planning to whack me. In turn, I realised they were doing their jobs but there was no way I was going to be 'taken out' by my ex-colleagues without a fight. What we were doing was legal—their actions against us were actually very illegal, and were only legitimised by political interests—and their behind the scenes, string-pulling, economic puppet masters—aimed at stopping us at all costs.

Their attempted plans to 'take me out' materialised one night. I was entertaining some friends at my house when I got a telephone call from someone purporting to be an ex-member of 101 Bn. Having also served in 101 Bn, I did not know this person but he tried to lure me to a so-called 'mini reunion' at the Muldersdrift Hotel.

I was immediately suspicious as he had called me on my home phone, the number of which was unlisted—and known to only you and Lafras. My suspicions were further aroused as the Muldersdrift Hotel was about seven kilometres down a dirt road from where I was residing. Very few people knew where I was living, least of all ex-101 Bn members. How did this so-called ex-101 Bn member know my phone number and where I lived?

It dawned on me that I was being set up for a 'hit'. So, being a prolific brandy and coke drinker in those days, I chose to stay at home and party with my real friends. After this incident I relocated to a cottage in Northriding Randburg, and quickly realised that I was, once again under surveillance. The lone surveillance operative left in a great hurry after I threatened him.

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During March 1997, I started receiving numerous phone calls from US-based journalists who all asked for my comments on more or less the same subjects. These included:

- Executive Outcomes was working in the Sudan, Algeria, and Morocco
- Executive Outcomes had deployed troops in both Rwanda and Burundi

• Executive Outcomes still had troops working within the Angolan Armed Forces

The information regarding our supposed involvement in Algeria, Sudan, Morocco, Rwanda, Burundi, and once more, Angola, had apparently been passed on to them by the South African intelligence services.

In addition, they asked me to comment on a host of companies that I had apparently created as offshoots of EO, all working in conflict zones across Africa.

I was also asked to comment on our 'activities' in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. I obviously denied these assertions and asked who their source was for the Sri Lanka/ Malaysia story in particular. I was told that some of the information had come from the US Department of State.

I promptly wrote a letter to Mr James Joseph of the US Embassy in Pretoria asking for an explanation:

Over the past few weeks, I have on numerous occasions been contacted by US correspondents who claim to have been provided with information from the US State Department. This information alleges links between Executive Outcomes and a number of companies that have no corporate connection to us at all. Furthermore, the information given by the US State Department alleges Executive Outcomes involvement with the governments of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Given that it appears to my company that someone may deliberately be feeding false information to the US State Department on our company's activities, I would be more than happy to spend time with personnel from your embassy in order to clarify any issues regarding Executive Outcomes that they may wish to ask.

The US embassy never responded.

In the aftermath of Rwanda, we calculated what the true costs of our operation would have been—based on the casualty figures the UN provided in its own documents—approximately 500 000 killed. These figures were certainly a gross underestimate of the true loss of life among innocent Rwandans. The number of wounded and those who became refugees were never accounted for. The 'too expensive' costs to deploy Executive Outcomes would have amounted to approximately US$200 per life lost or around US$125, if one considers the likely true casualties—and this included the requisite equipment we were told to source and procure.

The fact was that Rwandan lives were not considered to be of much financial value to the UN or the international community.

It was only Africa...and, after all, black deaths didn't matter.

I wrote to US Ambassador James Joseph asking him to verify his lies. He never responded (Photo Washington Post)

38:
The United Nations Investigates

In 1996, the UN despatched Enrique Bernales Ballesteros, its Special Rapporteur pursuant of its resolution 1995/5 and decision 1996/113, to investigate the so-called mercenary issue.

In reality, this investigation was aimed primarily at Executive Outcomes and our role in Africa and elsewhere. I was of the opinion that the UN had implemented this resolution because it did not like being shown up as the helpless, incompetent, money wasting, and disorganised organisation that it was—of course, it was also encouraged to do so by the DFA.

The UN had thus far stood idly by and allowed the war in Angola to continue unabated, allowed the rebels in Sierra Leone to commit grave atrocities and acts of terrorism, and twiddled their thumbs while hundreds of thousands of people were slaughtered in Rwanda.

When a government in trouble decided it could no longer rely on the UN and dared call in help from anyone other than a Western force or the UN itself, this was apparently regarded as confrontational behaviour towards the UN. The private companies that such governments contracted in to assist them (especially if they happened to be called Executive Outcomes) therefore needed to be closed down.

Of particular importance during this period were the meetings that Special Rapporteur Ballesteros had with Ambassador Jacob S Selebi, (Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations Office at Geneva) on 26 March and 31 July 1996. The Special Rapporteur recalled, in a number of previous reports, having made reference to mercenary activities originating in South Africa and aimed at perpetuating and reinforcing the apartheid regime.[378] He then acknowledged that this regime had been abolished and dismantled and that the country was now on the way to building a modern, multiparty, and multiracial democracy.

However, Ballesteros claimed, he had recently received reports about a private company registered in Pretoria as a security firm (Executive Outcomes) and its subsidiaries allegedly having sent mercenaries to Angola and Sierra Leone under contracts concluded with the governments of those countries in exchange for substantial cash payments and mining concessions.[379]

Bristling with incompetence and self-importance, the vast majority of UN forces have yet to prove their value to Africa (photo: VOA News)

The directors of the conglomerate were 'said to be connected with former members of 32 Battalion, which had fought in Angola under the name of Buffalo Battalion, and erstwhile members of racist and extreme right-wing paramilitary organisations[380] in South Africa'. The Special Rapporteur expressed his interest in visiting South Africa on an official mission to investigate these allegations in situ.

Ballesteros arrived in South Africa in mid-October 1996 and got to work, meeting people and organisations that could allegedly provide him with the required insight into Executive Outcomes. By his own admission, Ballesteros was unable to meet all the people and organisations that he had wished to, due to a 'lack of space'. He held meetings with representatives of the following non-governmental organisations: Black Lawyers Association; Cease-fire Campaign; Centre for Conflict Resolution (associated with the University of Cape Town); Centre for South African Studies (University of the Western Cape); Institute for Defence Policy; Lawyers for Human Rights; National Association of Democratic Lawyers; and the Social Department of the University of the Witwatersrand.

He apparently had a hectic schedule in South Africa according to the list of meetings in his report:

21 October 1996: Meeting with Chief Executive Officer of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Biki SV Minyuku.
22 October 1996: Meeting with the Special Advisor to the Minister of Justice, Vusi Pikoli.
23 October 1996: Meeting with Aziz Pahad, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Meeting with Major General Coetzee and Colonel Nolan both of Military Intelligence.
24 October 1996: Meeting with a team of senior officials and advisers from the Ministry of Safety and Security.
25 October 1996: Meeting with Deputy Director General of the Pretoria Attorney General's office (during which Ballesteros was told that the AG had already investigated Executive Outcomes in 1994 and would only do so again if there were indications or proof that we had acted unlawfully).
25 October 1996: Meeting with the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry and President of the Arms Control Commission, Kader Asmal.

26 October 1996: Meeting with Deputy Director General of Multilateral Affairs in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Abdul S. Minty.

It came as no great surprise that he only met with people and organisations that had expressed alarm regarding EO's role in ending conflicts in Africa. High on his agenda were the DFA and MI, the two organisations that were indeed supporting rebel forces in Africa and who were extremely concerned about the possibility of us exposing their duplicity.

Ballesteros and two UN associates arrived at our Danny Street offices on 25 October. Nico and I immediately recognised his extreme puffed up arrogance and self-importance. He was simply 'going through the motions' so that he would be able to 'truthfully' report back that he had indeed met us and held discussions. He had obviously already decided that EO was a force for instability.

When I confronted him, Ballesteros finally admitted that he had received special briefings on EO's activities from both DFA and MI.

His report was published on 20 February 1997:

As a result of the various complaints received, the Special Rapporteur requested an interview with the directors of Executive Outcomes (Pty) Ltd.

On 25 October 1996, he was received by Eeben Barlow and Nico Palm, President and Financial Director of the company, respectively. Mr. Barlow said that his company had been established in 1989 and was officially registered in Pretoria as a security service company. It was, however, part of a holding company, Strategic Resources Corporation (SRC), which included companies with various social purposes that provided different economic services. He said that the activities carried out by his company were all entirely legal. Executive Outcomes concluded contracts only with lawfully constituted and lawfully established Governments, not with armed opposition movements or groups of rebels or insurgents.

He said that Executive Outcomes had first concluded contracts with the Government of South Africa in order to provide military training for the South African Army and had then concluded contracts with the Angolan State-run oil company, Sonangol, to protect its oil wells. In July 1993, the high command of the Angolan Armed Forces requested Executive Outcomes to provide military training services for its troops. His company had concluded the contract because it considered that it would be dealing with the armed forces of a Government which had been legalised in the 1992 elections. It had nevertheless been subjected to a great deal of pressure to leave Angola and the company's last military instructor left the country on 14 January 1996.

Company employees had sometimes had to open fire in self-defence and when they were attacked. One year after Executive Outcomes' entry into Angola, in 1994, the Angolan Armed Forces had regained control of much of Angolan territory. The company had trained 159 Angolan 'instructors', who had received special instruction trained in mine detection. The victory by the Angolan Government forces marked the end of various kinds of illicit traffic in the country, such as traffic in marble, diamonds, weapons and

munitions. It had earned Executive Outcomes many new enemies, especially among arms dealers interested in keeping wars going. Mr Barlow said that Executive Outcomes had then been called in by the Government of Sierra Leone to train the army of that country. It had agreed on condition, that the Government should hold talks with the armed opposition to achieve peace and that, once peace had been achieved, it should hold democratic elections. In reply to a question by the Special Rapporteur, he admitted that his men had taken part in some military action in Sierra Leone, but had done so at the request of humanitarian agencies which wanted food aid to reach the interior of the country.

The accusations that they had received mining concessions in exchange for their presence in Sierra Leone were absurd: mines were a long-term investment that called for a great deal of capital that they did not have, just as they also had no knowledge of mining.

He also indicated that, during the peace negotiations in Sierra Leone, the armed opposition had said that Executive Outcomes had to leave the country. Strong pressure had been exerted against the company by sectors which included arms dealers' lobbies; non-African and even South African intelligence services; foreign companies which see Executive Outcomes as a difficult competitor; and all kinds of traffickers in illicit goods. Inside the Government of South Africa itself, diehard elements in the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs had constantly put pressure on his company. In the circumstances, the company had proposed to the Government of Sierra Leone that it should reduce its presence in the country by 50 per cent. The government had agreed to 30 per cent only. The company had nevertheless been prepared to leave the country if the Government so wished.

Mr. Barlow also said [he had] so far received requests for services from 34 governments, including the governments of some central Asian countries, and from one armed opposition movement. The latter request was rejected by the company, in accordance with its criteria. Executive Outcomes needs twelve months to train an army and make it effective and efficient in combat. He also said that his company does not sell or supply weapons: it instructs in the use of what it finds in the country concerned. As far as Executive Outcomes is concerned, all its logistical support is made available to the people of the country where it works. It is also involved in development and humanitarian work.

In this connection, he gave the Special Rapporteur a photocopy of a diploma of recognition awarded by the Sierra Leone association 'Children Associated with the War' to thank his company for its work on behalf of the child victims of the war. The Special Rapporteur asked Mr. Barlow why he thought he, his employees and his company were regarded as mercenaries. He answered that his men never saw themselves as mercenaries: 'We see ourselves more as soldiers and as Africans, out to help other Africans.'

I found it interesting that Ballesteros made no efforts to verify any of the statements made about us by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Military Intelligence, UNITA, RUF, Sean Cleary's Strategic Concepts, the South African media, and those who believed

everything the media wrote. We knew exactly what had motivated them to complain in the first place and it didn't surprise us that those with a vested interest would complain.

Apparently interviews with officials of the governments who employed us were not sufficiently valuable to have been included in Ballesteros' findings. Those same governments had, interestingly, also been ignored when they had called on the West and the UN for assistance.

His eventual report appeared to be logical and well thought out, but its connection to the reality of the situation on the ground was tenuous to say the least. While the principals he discussed seemed sound in theory, in practice, the UN's spineless failure to use force where force was necessary had given economically opportunistic terrorists the opportunity to bring untold misery to the people of Angola and Sierra Leone:

The Special Rapporteur recounts that a visit to South Africa gave him an opportunity to ascertain that mercenary activity linked to apartheid no longer exists. However, mercenary activities in Africa are increasingly taking the form of security companies which provide military training and security services in return for money and mining and energy concessions.

During our discussions Ballesteros continually questioned us to determine whether we had been granted any mineral or mining concessions in the countries we were working in. He desperately wanted me to confirm his 'intelligence' which was made up of lies. Despite my assurances to the contrary, his report still inferred that we had indeed been awarded mining concessions. It was a case of repeating a lie often enough for it to become the truth. Indeed, he proved himself to be nothing but an ill-informed buffoon.

UN Special Rapporteur Enrique Bernales Ballesteros was appointed to investigate EO's role in destabilising Africa and its alleged payment in resources (photo: Camello Parlante)

Ballesteros' long-awaited report on the use of mercenaries was long-windedly titled: 'The right of peoples to self-determination and its application to peoples under colonial or alien domination of foreign occupation—Report on the question of the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to

self-determination, submitted by Mr Enrique Bernales Ballesteros (Peru), Special Rapporteur pursuant to Commission resolution 1998/6.'

It was published by the UN's Economic and Social Council in January 1999, and made it patently clear that the UN would rather monitor and condemn instability before allowing a 'mercenary company' such as Executive Outcomes to operate.

The following are further extracts from his report:

Introduction:

At its 54th session the Commission on Human Rights adopted resolution 1998/6 of 27 March 1998, in which, inter alia, it reaffirmed that the recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries were causes for grave concern to all States and violated the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Commission called upon all States that had not yet done so to consider taking the necessary action to ratify the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries and urged them to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur in the fulfilment of his mandate. Taking note of the report of the Special Rapporteur (E/CN.4/1998/31 and Add.1), the Commission also urged all States to take the necessary steps and to exercise the utmost vigilance against the menace posed by the activities of mercenaries, and to take necessary legislative measures to ensure that their territories and other territories under their control, as well as their nationals, were not used for the recruitment, assembly, financing, training, and transit of mercenaries for the planning of activities designed to destabilise or overthrow the government of any state or threaten the territorial integrity and political unity of sovereign states or to promote secession. The Commission welcomed the adoption by some states of national legislation that restricted the use of mercenaries and the cooperation of those countries that had issued invitations to the Special Rapporteur to visit their countries. It also requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as a matter of priority, to publicise the adverse effects of mercenary activities on the right of peoples to self-determination and, when requested and where necessary, to provide advisory services to states that were affected by the activities of mercenaries.

The Commission on Human Rights also decided to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for three years and requested him to submit a report, with specific recommendations, to the Commission at its 55th session.

On 5 November 1998, the Third Committee of the General Assembly adopted a draft resolution on the question of the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self- determination.

9.... the Special Rapporteur sent a communication to all member states of the UN on 6 July 1998 requesting them to send information on the existence of mercenary activities, the possible participation by nationals of their country in such activities, and domestic legislation currently in force outlawing such activities. He also requested suggestions to help enhance the international approach to the topic, arrive at a better definition of mercenary, and regulate the private companies which offer security services and assistance and military advice and which sometimes recruit mercenaries.

Mercenary activities in Sierra Leone:

24 In previous reports, the Special Rapporteur has discussed the armed conflict in Sierra Leone and the presence there of private companies offering security services and military assistance and advice, and of mercenaries recruited by such companies. As is well known, Sierra Leone has for seven years been in the grip of an armed conflict which, having begun as a spillover from the civil war in Liberia, has made the country one of the poorest in Africa and the world and caused the displacement of 420 000 of its nationals. The security firm Executive Outcomes, which is registered in South Africa and made up of former members of 32-Battalion of the South African army, was contracted by Valentin Strasser's Government, but left Sierra Leone at the time the peace accord was signed in November 1996, after having provided military assistance services for several months.

25 In a coup d'état on 25 May 1997, led by Commander Johnny Paul Koroma, the constitutional President Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was overthrown and a revolutionary council was formed. Lower ranks of the armed forces took part in the coup. A number of foreign companies involved in diamond, titanium, gold, and bauxite mining left the country or suspended their operations. The governments of the region not only condemned the coup, but also isolated the new de facto government and demanded the return of the deposed President.

The de facto Government in its turn called on Nigeria to return Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

26 The Special Rapporteur has learned that while in exile in Guinea, the deposed President signed a contract with Sandline International, a company registered in the Bahamas and with offices in Chelsea, London, to provide him with military support, advice, and assistance in regaining power. This company is already known to the Special Rapporteur and has been mentioned in previous reports in connection with its unsuccessful intervention in Papua New Guinea[381] (see, for example, EICN.411998/31, paras. 93-99). In 1997 Sandline International signed a contract for US$36 million with the Government of Papua New Guinea, whose Prime Minister was then Sir Julius Chan, to carry out offensive military operations in Bougainville, engage the rebels of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, and provide mercenaries, sophisticated military equipment, and military assistance. Shortly afterwards, Sir Julius Chan's Government was legally ousted and mercenaries sent in by the company expelled.

27 According to the information received by the Special Rapporteur, a number of financial and mining companies with debts and interests of various kinds in Sierra Leone gave their support and even partial financial backing to the contract with Sandline International. After signing the contract, the company prepared and dispatched a document giving its view of the operations to be carried out and various strategic and tactical plans. Helicopters and military equipment were subsequently exported to Sierra Leone, allegedly via Bulgaria, Nigeria, and Liberia, in breach of the embargo imposed under Security Council resolution 1132 (1997); military experts were also sent and are still providing tactical and operational advice on the ground. The first arms sent by Sandline arrived on 22 February 1998.

28 On 10 March 1998, after bloody fighting in which the ECOMOG forces took part, the coalition government formed by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was overthrown, and President Tejan Kabbah was able to return to Freetown. The war continued, however. Soldiers loyal to the ousted military junta have committed atrocities against the civilian population in their flight to the east of the country. The decapitated, dismembered, or burnt corpses of more than 100 people were seen in the areas of Bo, Lunsar, Kenema and Makeni, as witness to the vengefulness of those who had been dislodged from power; 1 500 supporters of the junta were arrested and 59 were accused of treason. Of these 24 were sentenced to death at a trial without right of appeal and executed on 19 October 1998.

29 While ECOMOG forces devote themselves to keeping order in Freetown, Sandline International employees advise the Government as it plans the creation of a new army with no links to those involved in the coup d'état. Efforts are also being made to organise the population into civil defence or self-defence forces. Hinga Norman, a chief of the Mende Tribe and educated in the UK, has set up a 20 000-strong paramilitary force called Kamajor with the aim of stamping out the rebellion. This paramilitary force is also reported to be committing gross violations of human rights with the acquiescence of the government and after training and advice from Sandline International mercenaries. The Special Rapporteur has been informed of appalling acts of cruelty committed by mercenaries on captured rebels and on civilians suspected of collaborating with the insurgents. During the week of 30 November 1998, 70 rebels were killed in battle in Gberay, a rebel base 100 kilometres north of the capital. Many of the bodies were mutilated and incinerated.

30 As the Special Rapporteur has noted in previous reports, the presence in Sierra Leone of the company Executive Outcomes, which had fought the rebels and made possible the November 1996 peace agreement, did not help to avert the coup d'état of 25 May 1997 or the formation of an alliance of former enemies from RUF and AFRC in a coalition Government. Hiring private companies providing security and military assistance and advice is no substitute for maintaining a collective regional security system and genuinely professional national armed forces and security forces loyal to the democratic legal order. It is a false solution. When companies of this type leave the country, they also leave behind the structural problems they found when they arrived unsolved, if not actually worse.

31 The recruitment, financing, and use of mercenaries by such companies are unacceptable under any circumstances, even when the aim is claimed to be the restoration of a constitutional regime overthrown by a coup d'état. This means, however, that the international community must promote the development of effective regional and global collective security mechanisms and give its backing to the work of the United Nations, which has recently opened an office in Sierra Leone (the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone-UNOMSIL) to work for peace and human rights in that country.

35 The Special Rapporteur has established that, unlike mercenaries such as Colonel Bob Denard or Mike Hoare in Katanga during the 1960s, today's mercenaries do not work

independently. They are more likely to be recruited by private companies offering security services and military advice and assistance, in order to take part or even fight in internal or international armed conflicts. This is because the parties in a conflict have specific military needs that require the participation and hiring of professional soldiers. Mercenaries are usually, or have been, soldiers, combatants, or more frequently, members of special units and have experience with sophisticated weapons; this applies particularly to those recruited to take part in combat and to train those who are to make up battalions, columns or commando units. Armed conflicts, terrorism, arms trafficking, covert operations by third powers, governments' inability to establish or guarantee security in their own countries, and violence connected with positions of extreme intolerance all encourage the demand for mercenaries on the global market.

36 Within the historical structure of the nation state, which is still the basis of international society, it is inadmissible for any state legally to authorize mercenary activities, regardless of the form they take or the objectives they serve. Even where legislation is lacking or deficient mercenarism is an international crime. Mercenary activity arises in the context of situations that violate the right of peoples to self- determination and the sovereignty of states. In practice, mercenaries commit atrocities and impede the exercise of human rights. The mere fact that it is a government that recruits mercenaries, or contracts companies that recruit mercenaries, in its own defence or to provide reinforcements in armed conflicts does not make such actions any less illegal or illegitimate. Governments are authorised to operate solely under the constitution and the international treaties to which they are parties. Under no circumstance may they use the power conferred on them to carry out acts that impede the self-determination of peoples, to jeopardise the independence and sovereignty of the state itself, or to condone actions that may do severe harm to their citizens' lives and security.

37 The fact that military units made up of mercenaries are supposed to be more efficient, that the use of mercenaries helps to preserve the life of young conscripts, or that it is cheaper to recruit mercenaries than to maintain a regular army are weak arguments, and legally and ethically questionable. If such arguments were used as the grounds for praxis, states would reach a stage when they would have to abolish their military forces or cut them back drastically and invite mercenary organisations in to take charge of not only border control, but possibly also the maintenance of law and order.

38 Rather than yield to dangerous arguments such as those that aim to 'rehabilitate' the mercenary at a time of globalisation, the undermining of the sovereignty of the nation State, and the privatisation of conflicts, war, and the maintenance of law and order, it must not be forgotten that mercenaries, by definition, act without regard for ideals or legal or moral commitments. They are mercenaries not because order must be restored, armed conflicts must cease, or peace must be built, but because they have been paid significant amounts by third parties to involve themselves militarily in conflicts that do not concern them. Their involvement is thus directly motivated by financial gain. The same is true of modern business groups offering security services on an industrial scale around the world and recruiting, financing, and using mercenaries for some of their activities.

39 For mercenary activity to occur, there must be third parties with an interest in resorting to the employment of mercenaries in order to carry out activities that are to their advantage, even though such activities may violate the legislation in force and the international obligation not to interfere in the internal affairs of another state. Clearly, for such a relationship to exist, there must also be recruiting organisations and companies and organisations to act as intermediaries between those who supply and those who demand the service.

40 The Special Rapporteur is of the opinion that investigations into mercenary activities must be objective, encompass all those involved, and seek to determine the nature of the act, without accepting any formal legal limitations that may be invoked precisely to conceal the mercenary component. The investigators must also establish the actual identity and nationality of the mercenary, go through the files, rule out altruistic voluntary enlistment, compile information on recruitment and training centres, follow the trail of covert operations, obtain reliable data on aspects relating to the payment and other benefits agreed upon, and detect the simultaneous use of other nationalities and passports, etc. In cases where nationality is granted to foreigners taking part in an armed conflict, the investigation must establish the length of time, circumstances, and legal grounds for the good faith and legitimacy of the new nationality.

41 The issue of mercenary activity has so many ramifications nowadays that attention must focus on the matter of nationality, which hitherto has been considered as a means of differentiation and a determining factor in the definition of a mercenary. Indeed, a foreign power can avail itself of nationals of the country it intends to attack in order to do it serious harm. In such a case, the rules of international law as they now stand would not allow the act to be defined as mercenary, even if there was evidence of, for example, recruitment and payment. Even though existing international law may be excessively rigid or full of gaps or does not lend itself to the formal definition of a criminal as a mercenary, it would be wrong to invoke the existing rules either in too restrictive a manner or in such a way as to justify mercenary acts and behaviour.

42 Without obviating the need to clarify, refine, update, and expand the rules of customary international and treaty law to combat mercenary activity, it should be established as a principle that, in essence, the aim of such rules is to condemn a mercenary act in the broad sense of the buying and selling of military services that are not subject to the humanitarian standards that apply to armed conflicts and that are likely to lead to war crimes and human rights violations. It should not be forgotten that, in addition, current international law condemns interference by one state in the internal affairs of another and the impeding of the self- determination of peoples and that it is, if anything, an aggravating factor if the state interfering employs nationals of the other country for that purpose. Such nationals would not, strictly speaking, be considered mercenaries, but, on the part of those recruiting them, the aim of using them as mercenaries is objectively undeniable, as is the willingness of such nationals to accept a relationship that turns them into mercenaries.

43 The definition does not change if a national group organised abroad for purposes of opposing their country's government politically and militarily hires and pays mercenaries, based on their military experience, or experience in the use of arms and explosives, in

order to carry out attacks against the country and its government. In any case, a distinction must be made between political opposition to a regime, which is the right of any member of a national community, and the employment of methods that are inherently unlawful, such as the use of mercenaries.

45 The Special Rapporteur deems it necessary to remind the Commission on Human Rights of the need for the international community to examine, study, and reflect on the apparent connection between the persistence of an increase in mercenary activities and the obvious gaps in the international legislation currently in force. Furthermore, the increasing tendency of mercenaries to hide behind modern private companies providing security, advice, and military assistance may be due to the fact that international legislation has not taken account of new forms of mercenary activities.

47 The Commission on Human Rights has already drawn attention to the need to review and update the proposals intended to make the laws proscribing mercenary activities more effective... The Commission must have clear, unambiguous criteria that would enable it to propose to the Economic and Social Council, and, through it, to submit to the General Assembly, new clear and effective legal proposals for preventing and punishing mercenary activities... Statements formally condemning mercenary activities have not served to prevent an increase in calls on the services of mercenaries and recruiting companies of doubtful lawfulness and legitimacy. What is now needed is an improvement in the normative system to enable it to cope with the development of new criminal methods.

51 According to the information provided to the Special Rapporteur by governments, the laws of most member states do not classify mercenarism as a crime. In others, although it is classified as a crime, there is no known case in which the law has been enforced against anyone accused of being a mercenary. For instance, the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act, a law in force in the UK, prohibits British citizens from becoming mercenaries and from recruiting them. However, the last case in which a person was tried under that law dates back to 1896.

52 The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries adopted by the General Assembly on 4 December 1989 has not yet entered into force, although it has been more than nine years since its adoption as barely sixteen States have ratified or acceded to it. While its provisions contain measures which are a step forward towards the eradication of this reprehensible activity, it should be noted that article 1, paragraph 1, reproduces almost verbatim the text of article 47 of Additional Protocol 1 on the definition of a mercenary. Added paragraph 2 relates to mercenary violence against the constitutional order or territorial integrity of a state. No progress has therefore been made with regard to a better and simpler definition of the concept of mercenary, which would allow quicker and more direct action to be taken against mercenary activities. In any event, the Special Rapporteur must point out that it would be easier to improve this important instrument if it were to enter into force in the near future.

53 In this context of the gaps in and the limitations of universal international legislation, the countries of Africa enjoy better legal protection thanks to the Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, which was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) at its 1977 meeting in Libreville and entered into force in 1985. But ‘better

legal protection' does not mean full protection against all the current shapes, forms, and manifestations which mercenary activities may take on that continent.

55 ... the Special Rapporteur maintains that the relevant international legal instruments are imperfect tools for preventing and punishing mercenary activities. There are difficulties in applying article 47 of the 1977 Additional Protocol 1 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, particularly in cases where the person acquires the nationality of the country in which the fighting is taking place; mercenarism is not classified as an offence under the internal criminal law of many countries, and the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries has yet to enter into force, given the small number of states that have expressed an interest in becoming parties to it. Consequently, the international community is faced with a situation that actually affects it and the time has come for the consideration of the issue by the Commission on Human Rights also to include the need to review and update international legislation on mercenary activities.

56 A mercenary is a criminal; he acts not out of altruistic motives, but to earn money in exchange for his tactical and strategic skills and his handling of weapons and explosives. In this regard, the material connection between a mercenary's activity and the commission of terrorist acts has been established through many terrorist attacks in which the perpetrator was proven to be one or more mercenaries hired to commit the crime.

57 ... the Special Rapporteur [maintains] that various... terrorist attacks are carried out by highly specialised criminal agents who are hired to blow up aircraft, mine bridges, destroy buildings and industrial complexes, assassinate and kidnap persons, etc. While in many cases the terrorist agent comes from fanatic groups espousing extremist ideologies, it must be remembered that terrorism is also a criminal activity in which mercenaries participate for payment, disregarding the most basic considerations of respect for human life and a country's legal order and security.

58 In parallel with this... the international community must take into account the connection existing between terrorism and mercenary activities and the participation of mercenaries in criminal acts of a terrorist nature. It is suggested that commissions and working and study groups for the prevention and punishment of terrorism should be recommended to include mercenary activities in their analyses and conclusions.

59 The whole world was shaken by last year's terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania. We know that they were by no means the first and that the madness of fanatical sects may cause further mass crimes against humanity. In this context, the Special Rapporteur considers it crucial to investigate the connections between the commission of terrorist attacks and the presence of mercenaries as material agents of these acts. To fail to consider a hypothesis such as that outlined here or to use a different criterion to assess the two phenomena on the grounds that the motivation is different, would be a serious error that would weaken the line of prevention of terrorism and mercenary activities.

60 A mercenary involves himself in armed conflicts as a function of his military experience, doing so for substantial reward. Many mercenaries who are experts in the use of explosives and technical devices with destructive material effects are hired to commit deadly attacks that cause collective fear and dread or, in other words, indiscriminate terror. Accordingly, although the mercenary is not involved in the formulation of extremist

ideologies that allow terror as a means of intimidation for the achievement of its objectives, he assumes the status of terrorist when, for pay, he agrees to become the instrument of terror and commits acts that cause death and destruction with horrible efficiency. Without ceasing to be one, a mercenary can also become a terrorist.

Private security and military assistance companies and mercenary activities:

63 In [his] previous report... the Special Rapporteur dealt fully with private companies operating in the international market offering security services and military assistance and advice, normally matters reserved for the state and for which the state must assume responsibility. All the arguments and reservations expressed in that report are still valid...

64 These companies are developing their offers more and more aggressively, putting forward arguments for legitimacy based on military efficiency, cheaper operations, their personnel's proven experience, and an alleged comparative advantage that would make it feasible or desirable to hire them for peace-building or peacekeeping operations such as those conducted by the United Nations or ECOWAS. In documents prepared by these companies, the Special Rapporteur has read studies of the comparative costs of various peacekeeping operations and what these companies would charge, with the difference, according to them, of greater efficiency for breaking up pockets of resistance, extinguishing hardline opposition, or opening up avenues for humanitarian assistance. Advertising for these companies and the services and jobs they offer can be found on the Internet and leave no doubt as to what is being offered and the connection with mercenary agents.

65 In contrast, national states are showing no sign of a reaction... the Special Rapporteur has asked for their opinion on this matter, but the replies received have not dealt with it. This silence is alarming inasmuch as there are situations in which a country's press reports in abundant detail on the presence of companies involved in matters of national security and public safety without regard for human rights and in open contradiction with constitutional provisions that categorically state that internal order and security are the exclusive responsibility of the State.

66 South Africa is the country that has adopted the clearest position on these companies and their supply of military assistance services abroad. A South African law enacted in 1998 regulates military assistance abroad and defines the jurisdiction of private companies in this regard. It introduces a sentence of no more than ten year's imprisonment and a fine of no more than one million rand for nationals or foreigners resident in South Africa who participate in military missions outside South African territory unauthorised by the State. It also imposes limits on the freedom of security companies to deal with military matters. It regulates, but does not prohibit, the existence of these companies which employ mercenaries. Meanwhile, Executive Outcomes ... established in 1989 on the initiative of Eeben Barlow ... has broad experience in military assistance in African countries, [and is] registered with the Department of Defence as an organisation providing military assistance, mainly training, abroad.. .It will be necessary to see the practical consequences of the law... in order to form a definite opinion on its usefulness and efficiency.

67 During his mission to South Africa in October 1996 at the invitation of President Mandela's government, the Special Rapporteur was told by Barlow that his company had no problems with the promulgation of that law, provided it did not represent an added administrative burden that could reduce his organisation's operational efficiency. As to the rest, he said, his company did business only with legitimate Governments and not with rebels or insurgents and made every effort to be scrupulous in its respect for the human rights of the inhabitants of the countries in which it intervened and for the rules of international humanitarian law. However, a recent Channel 4 documentary on 'The War Business' shown on British television in May 1998 charged that Executive Outcomes had exploded a napalm bomb[382] in a market in an African village, killing 500 people, including civilians, of course, in a single day.

68 Regardless of the declarations of good intentions and respect for human rights and humanitarian law made by the directors of these companies, the Special Rapporteur emphasises that a matter of principle is the basis of the analysis and of the stance that the Commission on Human Rights should adopt. National security and public safety and action to combat rebels, traffickers, and terrorists are not merchandise that can be freely sold. They are, instead, matters related to a state's very existence and raison d'etre; providing security and maintaining law and order is solely the state's responsibility.

70 If governments accept [the substitution of mercenaries] they forsake their peoples and expose them to the risks of private protection that can discriminate among population groups for reasons of race or ideology; make use of military offensive and combat weapons normally reserved for forces that are the expression of the authority of the state; and, in that context, commit every kind of human rights abuse and violation.

71 If ... private companies providing security services and military assistance and advice resort to the use of mercenaries, it must be made clear that the explanation given, i.e. that they act in the service of a constitutional or legitimate Government or to restore one to power, is not acceptable. The distinction between using mercenaries for good or evil ends is no more admissible than is the distinction between good and bad mercenaries. A state's weakness, a state's impoverishment and disintegration, the breakdown of the constitutional system, internal armed conflicts, and anything that might constitute a grave risk for public order and peace in a country must be resolved on the basis of the multilateral security agreements that exist in all regions and on all continents, calling on international cooperation and strengthening all the peace-building and peacekeeping operations which are, according to the San Francisco Charter, to be carried out by the United Nations.

72 Specifically, it is neither lawful nor advisable, no matter how often short- term or emergency reasons are invoked, to entrust a country's security and the speedy settlement of armed conflicts to private companies which hire mercenaries to achieve those objectives and will earn substantial economic profits for their participation. Consider also that countries facing a situation in which they call on these companies are usually in a poor economic and financial position and lack the funds to pay for their services. They are therefore obliged to do so by granting concessions for resources that are part of the

national heritage. The companies are prepared for this highly lucrative eventuality and have set up various branches and subsidiaries. Thus, Strategic Resources Corporation (SRC), the holding company for Executive Outcomes, has other independent companies such as the Branch Energy mining and oil company; Heritage Oil and Gas; Diamond Works, established in Vancouver in 1996 and today Canada's largest diamond producer; and airlines such as Ibis Air and other transport, logistics, and service enterprises.

73 Of the companies offering security services and military assistance and advice on the globalized world market, mention should be made of Defence Systems Limited (DSL), which provides security to several mining and oil companies, Saladin Security; Control Risks Group; Braddock, Dunn and McDonald Inc—headed by a former US Secretary of Defence and headquartered in McLean, Virginia; Integrated Security Systems; Booz Allen and Hamilton, which trains the Saudi military forces; Vinnell Corporation, with Viet Nam war experience; O'Gara Protective Services; Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC); and Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI), with headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, which trained the Croatian army in 1995 and is currently training the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These companies may affect the exercise of sovereignty in the countries in which they operate, create resentment among the inhabitants, and contribute to impunity for the crimes committed by the mercenaries they hire.

74 Who is responsible for the human rights violations committed? The company will say it is the mercenaries acting individually or abusing their powers. The state will say that responsibility lies with the company and not with its own officials or forces. It is time for member states and for the Commission on Human Rights to make a detailed study of this matter. More and more Governments are hiring these companies to settle the military conflicts that are destabilising them, knowing full well that a mercenary component is included in the offer. Other bodies, including international organisations, sign contracts with them for security and logistical support. It is predictable that some governments may also resort to this type of company to undertake unilateral action in another country, on the pretext of establishing order or ensuring peace in a given region. All of this is tantamount to officially tolerated mercenary intervention, even if it is with 'the best of intentions'.

75 Must the Commission on Human Rights accept such a situation? Is it not obvious to the international community that the trend is to replace traditional peacekeeping forces, which, under international law, are the responsibility of the UN and regional organisations, by operations carried out by these companies? It is rather strange that, in parallel with the growth of these companies' activities, a smear campaign has been waged against peacekeeping operations and that reference is being made to the unfortunate events in Somalia. The Commission should pay priority attention to the fact that a kind of privatisation of war is being promoted through unilateral positions implemented by these private companies, with unforeseeable implications for the exercise of human rights... the international community cannot allow the free and globalized market to function as well for operations for the sale of military assistance and peacekeeping and peace-building operations that are the province of the international organisations. To do otherwise would

mean, in practice, allowing paramilitary forces with a mercenary component to interfere in internal affairs ...

76 When this report is published, the Special Rapporteur will already have visited the United Kingdom, a country where some of the companies working in this line of military assistance and advisory services are registered ... The Special Rapporteur... [considers] it advisable for the Commission on Human Rights and other UN bodies to look into the possibility of convening an international conference of experts to study and take specific decisions on this matter, paying particular attention to the fact that these companies would like to be regarded as an alternative to the conduct of UN peace operations; that the hiring of such companies may lend legitimacy to the use of mercenaries; and, in particular, that a system should be devised for the protection of international human rights and the rules of international humanitarian law in a world of privatized wars and private combatants and police.

Current status of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries:

77 The Special Rapporteur has shown in his preliminary reports to the Commission on Human Rights that the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, adopted by the General Assembly on 4 December 1989 in its resolution 44/34, expands the international regulation of the question and confirms the legal nature of the resolutions and declarations of United Nations bodies condemning mercenary activities. Its entry into force will contribute to preventive cooperation among states, better identification of situations involving mercenaries, and the clear determination of jurisdiction in each case, and will facilitate procedures for the extradition of mercenaries and the effective prosecution and punishment of offenders.

78 Unfortunately, only sixteen States have completed the process of expressing their willingness to be bound by the International Convention, while a further 22 are required for its entry into force. Those states are: Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belarus, Cameroon, Cyprus, Georgia, Italy, Maldives, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Suriname, Togo, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Ten other states have signed the International Convention, but have not yet ratified it. They are: Angola, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Germany, Morocco, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Uruguay and Yugoslavia. Pursuant to article 19, the International Convention is to enter into force on the 30th day following the date of deposit of the 22nd instrument of ratification or accession with the Secretary- General. Its failure to enter into force nine years after its adoption means that international legislation on mercenaries continues to be limited to article 47 of the 1977 Protocol 1 Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the 1977 OAU Convention on the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa.

Conclusions:

79 Mercenary activities continue to exist in many parts of the world and to take on new forms. The recruitment and hiring of mercenaries by private companies providing

security services and military assistance and advice and, in turn, the hiring of these companies by governments which entrust them with responsibility for security, maintaining public order and safety, and even armed combat against rebel forces and organised crime are a serious challenge to the international human rights protection system currently in force.

80 Although mercenaries pose as technicians or military experts hired as such by private companies providing security services and military assistance and advice, or by governments, this changes neither the nature nor the status of those who hire themselves out to meddle and cause destruction and death in foreign conflicts and countries.

81 Since the nature of the act and the classification of a mercenary have not changed, although the forms and operational methods have, the condemnation of mercenary activities and the use of mercenaries by the Commission on Human Rights and other UN bodies is still valid. Mercenary activities impede the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination and jeopardise the sovereignty of States, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, the stability of constitutional Governments and the enjoyment of the human rights of the peoples concerned. They are, by definition, wrongful and unlawful activities.

82 The diversification and modernisation of operational methods do not mean that mercenary activities are disappearing; rather, the conclusion is that, as mercenaries have become better organised and their pay has increased, their numbers have grown and more persons are prepared to do the job, although, for reasons of self-esteem, they sometimes prefer to pose and think of themselves as military experts or soldiers of peace.

83 The information received by the Special Rapporteur suggests that, even though Africa continues to be the continent most affected by mercenary activities, these activities have spread to other continents, although the methods of operation vary according to the situation in the country in which their services are hired.

84 Mercenaries have been particularly active in Sierra Leone, where they were taken first by Executive Outcomes ... and then by Sandline International

... These two played an important role in the overthrow of the military junta of the alliance formed by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and in restoring democratically elected President Tejan Kabbah to power. They also trained the Kamajor paramilitary troops who are fighting the rebel forces of the overthrown government with the acquiescence of the current government and are responsible for grave human rights violations against prisoners and the civilian population. As a result of this intervention, a number of affiliates of Executive Outcomes and Sandline International are now exploiting Sierra Leone's mineral resources, and the Diamond Works company has become Canada's largest diamond producer thanks to its operations in this West African country.

85 The Special Rapporteur has observed that the current situation is marked by the inadequacy of the international rules which deal with and punish mercenarism. The legal gaps and ambiguities detected suggest that the existing set of rules is by no means effective for successfully combatting mercenary activities.

89 The hiring of private companies providing security services and military assistance and advice is also an indicator of vested interests, more particularly those of third powers, which see the use of this type of company as a way of effectively intervening in another country's internal affairs, without having responsibility for such intervention being attributed to them directly, without their own military forces risking casualties, and without having to bear military costs.

90 The growth of this type of company is indicative of little, if any, international reaction to their activities. Even some international organisations have given in to the temptation of using their services to obtain logistical support to or open up avenues of humanitarian assistance. There is also a chance that traditional Government peace-building and peacekeeping forces may be replaced by these companies, in conjunction with a smear campaign against the government forces and reminders of serious incidents that have occurred, such as those in Somalia. The possibility of an artfully devised campaign and intentionally promoted tolerance of this type of company warrants serious investigation.

Recommendations:

93 The Commission on Human Rights should pay priority and urgent attention to the challenge to the system for the international protection of human rights created by the growth and development of companies providing security services and military assistance and advice, their recruitment and use of mercenaries and the increase in the use of such companies by Governments facing internal armed conflicts or the aggression of organised crime or terrorism ...

94 The Commission on Human Rights must continue to uphold its explicit condemnation of mercenary activities, regardless of the form they take, requesting the member states of the UN to classify mercenarism as a crime in their internal criminal law and to make the fact of being a mercenary an aggravating factor in the commission of other wrongful criminal acts, especially acts of terrorism.

95 The Commission on Human Rights must also communicate once more with all member states of the Organisation to recommend that they should explicitly prohibit the use of their territory for the recruitment, training, assembly, transit, financing, and use of mercenaries.

96 Given the legal ambiguities and gaps that currently facilitate the use of mercenaries and the increase in their numbers, it is recommended that the Commission on Human Rights should invite member states to ratify or accede to the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries.

97 The Commission on Human Rights also has to consider the serious risk of joint action by terrorists and mercenaries in carrying out attacks in which some are motivated by ideological, political, or religious beliefs, or simply by hatred, while others just want to earn money. It should therefore be recommended that the studies, plans, and action which the Commission considers in order to prevent and punish human rights violations and abuses, particularly terrorism, should also take account of the dimension of participation by mercenaries.

98 The Commission should recommend to the Economic and Social Council that it allocate the necessary financial and budget resources to the Office of the UN High Commissioner

for Human Rights to enable it to disseminate information, in the bulletins it is publishing, on the adverse effects of mercenary activities on the enjoyment of human rights and the exercise of the right of peoples to self- determination. The High Commissioner must also be allocated the resources it needs to provide technical assistance services to countries which have suffered the consequences of mercenary activities, if they so request.

99 The Commission on Human Rights must remind all states and international organisations of the need for constant vigilance in monitoring companies that employ mercenaries, particularly those that offer security services and military assistance and advice on the globalized international market.

100 The Commission on Human Rights must carefully monitor the human rights situation and the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination in the countries where these companies operate.

101 The Commission must also remember that mercenaries base their comparative advantage and greater efficiency on the fact that they do not regard themselves as being bound to respect human rights or the rules of international humanitarian law. Greater disdain for human dignity and greater cruelty are considered efficient instruments for winning the fight. The participation of mercenaries in armed conflicts and in any other situation in which their services are unlawful, may jeopardize the self-determination of peoples and always hampers the enjoyment of the human rights of those on whom their presence is inflicted. (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland)

In a subsequent UN press release, the following was noted:

Enrique Bernales Ballesteros of Peru, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Mercenaries, has appealed to member states to ratify, 'as soon as possible', the long-dormant convention aimed at outlawing mercenaries fighting mostly in today's civil wars in Africa.

The delay in the entry into force of the 'International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries' is facilitating the growing new phenomenon of mercenarism, Bernales says.

Although the African continent still suffers the most from mercenary activities, Bernales says in a 15-page report, 'mercenaries also have been active in other continents, where they have been involved in, inter alia, terrorist attacks and illicit trafficking'.

Another company, the South Africa-based Executive Outcomes, intervened militarily in a previous conflict in Sierra Leone under a contract for the provision of services which brought it millions of dollars and other company benefits.

'It is well known that this company has had no qualms about recruiting mercenary elements when its participation has been sought in security matters, a factor that would undermine the internal stability of any country', the report said. The case of Sierra Leone confirms this, the report notes, since despite the company's presence in the country for several months, the coup d'état of May 1997 could not be avoided.

In a press briefing on 25 March 1999 Ballesteros said: 'The activities of mercenaries has [sic] affected deeply the political stability of Africa. The situation is very bad in Angola, the two Congos, and Sierra Leone.'

In a further press briefing he said that the use of mercenaries:

...was a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination. He said the mandate of the Special Rapporteur also included, among other things, armed conflict, terrorism, covert operations, and trafficking in arms. All states were asked to investigate the use of mercenaries in all criminal activities in their countries.

He said, as in all the reports, there had been a focus on the use of mercenaries in Africa. There was no internal conflict or other problem where mercenaries were not involved. Mercenaries were seen in Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, among other places. In the western parts of the countries, which were rich with precious stones and oils, outside interests, including Mafias, had hired mercenaries to enable them to get rich from those resources. The General Assembly and the Security Council had both passed resolutions against that, and those resolutions needed to be respected to protect the people of the region.

Ballesteros conveniently forgot that the situations in both Angola and Sierra Leone were vastly improved by the time Executive Outcomes left. Rebels in both states had been forced to the negotiating table and peace treaties had been signed. If the UN missions to Angola and Sierra Leone had done their jobs after our departure, the status quo would have held. They didn't and it didn't.

It was highly disingenuous of him to equate the employees of private military companies, particularly Executive Outcomes, with terrorists and criminals. In Angola, the terrorist organisation was UNITA and in Sierra Leone it was the RUF. They had committed the atrocities and Executive Outcomes had put an end to them. Yet, they enjoyed the UN's full support.

The rampaging and mayhem would never have restarted in either place had the UN missions there been capable of doing their jobs. Ballesteros attacked, in particular, the idea of mercenaries working in Africa, insisting the UN was there to conduct peacekeeping operations. But he completely ignored its record of miserable failures without a single success to show on that troubled continent. At the time of writing, the ongoing conflicts in East, West, and Central Africa bear silent witness to the UN's incompetence.

So far, the UN has remained remarkably silent on the large number of private military companies working in Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the so-called coalition forces. Is this because they are there at the behest of the Americans who want to reduce the number of US soldiers being sent home in body bags?

The South African media too, have been conspicuously quiet about the South African companies trying to emulate EO in those conflict areas. I wonder if that would be the case if Executive Outcomes had been there.

Despite numerous allegations and in-depth investigations by both the UN and the media, Executive Outcomes was never found guilty of any human rights violations or

criminal activity—something the coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan cannot say in good conscience.

Again, showing its incredible hypocrisy, the UN has, at the time of writing, made large-scale use of PMCs to protect its members and its activities.

The UN and the South African media has been remarkably silent on South African PMCs in Iraq and elsewhere (Photo Focus)

39:
The Not So Mysterious Dr Schultz

In late August 1996, I received a strange telephone call from a man who identified himself as 'Dr Schultz'. He told me he was an advisor to the German government and that he was calling me from Cairo, Egypt where he claimed he was travelling with a German government delegation.

"My government is keen for me to meet you to discuss possible future cooperation between ourselves and your company," he said.

I began to wonder how I could ever convince the 'Germans' that our interests did not coincide with theirs. Besides, I very much doubted Dr Schultz's claim of being part of a German government delegation as his German accented English was marked by decidedly French undercurrents. A quick check revealed that there was indeed a German delegation in Cairo—but there was no 'Dr Schultz' in its midst.

I decided, however, to give him the benefit of the doubt until we met face-to-face. Schultz offered to pay my airfare to London and whatever other expenses I might incur. I declined, not wanting to be beholden to a foreign government we weren't working for. We agreed to meet in London sometime in November. I told him I would determine the time and place of the meeting, and that I would advise him of the details in due course. He agreed to this procedure but muttered that it was not how he was used to doing things.

My response was, 'either my way or no way'.

I discussed the matter with Nico and although we both believed Schultz was part of a setup, we agreed that I should travel to London and meet him.

A few days later I flew off to meet the mysterious Dr Schultz. I did a reconnaissance of the intended meeting place as well as where I intended to take Schultz for a sit- down meeting once we had met.

Huddled in a warm coat in the foyer of the Cumberland Hotel on that cool November morning, I waited for Schultz's call. I also had a support agent with me to assist if necessary.

When the call came, he greeted me cheerfully in his affected German-English accent and told me he was on the train from Heathrow and would be in London soon.

"Whereabouts are you?" he asked.

"I am close to Oxford Street," I answered. "When you reach the corner of Edgware Road and Oxford Street, call me again and I'll tell you where to go. How will I recognise you?"

Schultz gave me a detailed description of himself—including the mandatory The Times newspaper under his right arm. He probably thought I would be impressed by his tradecraft, but I thought he had been reading too many spy novels.

He had no idea what to expect, but I was well prepared for him.

I directed him to the Cumberland Hotel on his second call. When he stepped through the Oxford Street entrance into the foyer, I immediately identified him from the

description he had given me and signalled my support agent into action. She walked over to him, took him by the arm, and led him out of the hotel through one of the side entrances and into a waiting taxi. She had arranged the taxi shortly before Schultz arrived and it had been waiting outside the hotel with its engine idling.

The Cumberland Hotel, London, where the author and his support agent met the mysterious Dr Schultz (photo: TripAdvisor.com)

I followed them and jumped into the same taxi.

As we sped off to Fortnum & Mason, I put out my hand and introduced myself. "Dr Schultz, at last we meet."

He was both surprised and speechless. He knew he had been outsmarted and we could see he was afraid.

As I grasped his trembling hand, he struggled to find words. His first stuttered sentence was, "It is pretty in Pretoria at this time of the year—where are you taking me?"

He had lost the German accent and was speaking English with a decidedly French accent.

"To a quiet place where we won't be disturbed, Doctor."

He put his hand out to my support agent as though to introduce himself, but she ignored it and stared at him wordlessly. This made him even more jittery.

"Why did you take me out through the other door of the hotel?" he asked cautiously.

"So that my people could photograph you, Doctor—for records purposes."

Concern flashed across his face. He had expected me to be alone but I wanted him to think I had a large network of agents supporting me and that he was under surveillance.

Schultz was obviously worried. I could see his mind frantically working on his predicament and wondering how many people might be working with me. He didn't need to know I was bluffing. The more worried he got, the more he would tell me about why he had really wanted to meet with me.

We didn't speak again during the drive through the busy streets of London.

As the taxi stopped in front of Fortnum & Mason, my agent bundled Schultz out of the taxi and on to the busy sidewalk. I stayed behind to pay the driver and then followed them upstairs to the restaurant. I joined Schultz at the table my agent had led him to. She sat almost directly behind him which unnerved him even more. He kept glancing anxiously about, thinking that everyone including the waitress and the old ladies drinking tea were EO agents.

"Well, Dr Schultz, how can I possibly help you?" I asked.

"I am sure you've realised I am not German?" he stammered. I nodded at his rhetorical question with a smile.

"I am with the French Intelligence Service. I am very impressed at how you fooled me," he blurted out.

"Well, I'm sure we aren't meeting to discuss my operational capabilities. How can I help you?" I asked again.

"Shall I call you 'Eeben' or would you prefer 'David Barnes'?" he asked.

'David Barnes' was an alias I had used for a very specific Directorate Covert Collection operation many years before. There was only one other person who knew it had belonged to me.

"You can call me Eeben," I said, "but now I know that you are controlling an agent within the South African Directorate of Covert Collection. There was only one other person who knew about 'David Barnes', so I know who your agent is. It is indeed a small world, Doctor."

Realising that he had just blown an agent working inside Military Intelligence, Schultz fell silent for a while.

"Let's not argue the past. We would like to know which African countries are calling on you for help. We will reward you handsomely if you agree to cooperate. We would also like to know who within those governments is corruptible and who is not," he said.

"So you expect me to become an agent for the French Intelligence Service?" I asked.

"No, no, not an agent—just someone who is willing to help us and see that our interests in Africa are not compromised. We will pay you very well."

I could make no distinction between an agent and someone who helps an intelligence service for financial gain.

"I don't think so Dr Schultz," I replied.

By now, I was actually feeling sorry for him. He had been second-guessed regarding his meeting with me, he had compromised an agent in the DCC, and he had failed in his attempt to recruit me. I suspected he had also fallen victim to claims that I was an agent for numerous intelligence services. I motioned my support agent that it was time to go.

"Wait, please don't go—can I call you tonight, please?" he asked as I got up.

"You can, but I don't know what purpose it will serve. My people here will watch and make sure that you don't follow us."

"Give us ten minutes before you try to leave," I said over my shoulder as my agent and I left a worried-looking Schultz sitting at the table.

He didn't know that I had nobody else in the restaurant and I have no doubt he waited out his time before leaving. By then, my support agent and I were long gone.

Schultz called me later that evening and tried to set up another meeting with me in Hyde Park, claiming he wanted to show me photographs of weapon systems the French had been unable to identify. I knew he was trying to get me into a compromising situation, which his men would this time no doubt photograph, and then try to blackmail me into cooperating with them.

I declined his invitation and that was the last I heard of the not-so-mysterious Dr Schulz.

40:
The Papua New Guinea Fiasco

Our much-publicised and criticised foray into Papua New Guinea (PNG) started in January 1997.

Papua New Guinea, located in the Pacific Ocean to the north of Australia, shares the large island of New Guinea with another former client of ours—Indonesia's Irian Jaya.

Initially the island was divided into two regions. In 1948 the two regions were merged for administrative purposes and became known as Territory of Papua and New Guinea, and were administered by Australia. In 1971, the eastern half of the island became known as Papua New Guinea (PNG) and became self-governing in 1973. It became independent from Australia in 1975. The western half of the island formed the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya.[383]

Following the discovery of vast copper deposits on Bougainville (one of PNG's satellite islands in the Solomon group) it was inevitable that problems would soon follow.

The conflict on Bougainville started when its leaders alleged that the Australian-operated Panguna copper mine had had a devastating impact on the environment, as a result of which, the entire length of the Jaba River had been poisoned. The poisoning had resulted in birth defects and in the extinction of the island's flying fox. Adding fuel to the fire was the dissatisfaction of landowners in having gained no benefit from the massive profits generated by the mine. As one of the world's largest open-pit copper mines, Panguna Mine generated approximately 40% of PNG's Gross Domestic Product.

The Panguna Copper Mine located in Papua New Guinea
(photo: Radio New Zealand)

The conflict soon escalated.

In 1988, a Panguna landowner—Francis Ona—led an armed uprising against the Panguna Mine and he eventually became the commander of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). Armed conflict between the BRA and PNG's Defence Force escalated rapidly and the resultant closure of Panguna Mine the following year cost the PNG government millions of dollars in lost revenue. The Australian mining company,

likewise, suffered a huge loss of income—as did the Australian tax authorities. Countless millions more were spent on efforts to contain the conflict situation which worsened steadily. This had a devastating effect on PNG's economy.

Members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (photo: Post Courier)

Despite several cease-fires and talks aimed at resolving the conflict, fighting continued throughout the mid-and late-1990s.

This was not the small rebellion the world was led to believe it was. More than 10 000 people had already been killed and the PNG Defence Force had suffered serious losses. Australia had ignored PNG's calls for help, and the UN and its surrogates had been remarkably quiet about the catastrophe there.

These were the circumstances prevailing in 1996 when Tim Spicer, OBE, an ex-lieutenant colonel in the Scots Guards and the director of Sandline International—a fledgling company only a month old—received a phone call from Alistair Morrison of the British-based Defence Systems Limited (DSL). Morrison put Tim in touch with the PNG Defence Minister, Matthias Ijape. Spicer and Ijape arranged to meet in Australia over the coming Easter period.

As Tim would later recall:

At least I knew what I did not want to do. I did not want to run a security company. Whatever Sandline International turned out to be, it would be something more than that. In Angola, Tony Buckingham had seen a legitimate government locked in a conflict situation, requiring expertise that was not forthcoming from other friendly governments or the UN, and EO[384] had adapted what had previously been seen as mercenary work and put it in a formal package, which had never happened before.

Buckingham had seen EO at work and thought this method of applying skills, formally, honestly, and openly, for a legitimate government and for a worthwhile cause was a good marketable idea that could be put in a corporate setting...

The template we had before us was the work of EO in Angola.

Tim flew to Australia, accompanied by the ever-active Tony Buckingham, to meet a high-powered PNG delegation consisting of Matthias Ijape, Defence Secretary James

Malagepa, and the Chief of Defence Staff, General Jerry Singirok MBE. Like EO had done, Tim intended to use Tony as a guarantor for the funding that would be required.

The PNG officials said they were having a lot of problems with Australia, although that country was their southern neighbour, former administrator, and supposed ally. The Australian government, despite desperate pleas by the government of PNG, had consistently refused them military support to counter the rebellion on Bougainville. Tim recalled:

...when I heard this, I thought it was very strange indeed. Here was a large, powerful country—formerly the colonial power—that had a defence agreement with the friendly government of a country in which it had huge investments. Why was it that they were not helping these people win the war? The few helicopters they had supplied— those clapped-out Hueys—were supplied on condition they would not be armed or used in Bougainville at all. All this reinforced the view that where there were legitimate governments that needed help that friendly nations refused to supply, they would eventually turn in desperation to the private sector. What else could they do?

The UN had also remained remarkably silent.

Tim had just discovered something that we at EO had known for some time: so-called friendly governments, the UN, and others, were quite happy to talk about resolving conflicts and ensuring stability—as long as they did not have to compromise their hidden agendas. These agendas all appeared to be linked to natural resources in countries that were unable to utilise their wealth to achieve financial independence. When these countries called for outside help after having exhausted their options, they were condemned. Those that answered their calls for help were regarded as resource thieves—or claims were made that they were being paid in resources.

Tim would later discover just how deep the hidden agendas could cut.

After several months of negotiations, haggling, foot dragging, and discussions, Tim was finally ready to present his plan to the PNG Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan.

Sir Julius Chan, the prime minister of Papua New Guinea (photo: The Australian)

In the lead-up to the meeting, he began to suspect that all was not well with General Singirok. The general kept delaying scheduled meetings or failing to turn up for them. He only discovered much later that Singirok was receiving a 'retainer' from a British defence supplier.

Lafras and Nic van den Bergh had already been contacted by Tim and he had kept them abreast of his planned actions as well as his desire to subcontract the PNG project to EO and other companies if it was awarded to him. They discussed the matter with me in late December 1996.[385]

"Tim Spicer is using the same financial guy as Tony Buckingham—Michael Grunberg," Lafras informed me.

"What exactly did Tim's warning order to you entail?" I asked. Nic sketched the situation to me as he had understood it.

In essence, Tim had asked if an EO team could assist with the training of PNG Special Forces and give some specialised input on aspects related to operational and tactical planning. Tim had been unable to specify a timetable for the movement of our men to PNG, but he expected it would be 'soon'.

"We know you don't like Tim ..." Lafras began.

"No, it's not that I don't like him. I just wasn't charmed when I was told he was passing himself off as one of EO's directors. I discussed that matter with him on the phone and that was that. As far as I'm concerned, that's water under the bridge."

Tim had not been the first—and he certainly would not be the last—to pose as a 'director' or indeed, even a founder, of EO.

Tim was finally able to present his proposal to Sir Julius sometime in early January 1997, more than a year after first having made contact with the PNG government. By the time his proposal for resolving the situation was finally approved, the military situation had escalated and intervention was becoming both inevitable and urgent.

PNG's elections had been set for April 1997 but there was still a lot of foot dragging and toing and froing. Sir Julius, however, was keen to show that something positive was being done to contain the BRA before voters went to the polls.

General Jerry Singirok indicated his approval of Tim's plan to the Deputy Secretary of the PNG Department of Finance as follows:

> In reference to the draft review, you are aware of the same issues we have raised with Sandline representatives but they are obviously not prepared to negotiate or accommodate.
>
> Otherwise for those issues, the Secretary of Defence and the Commander are happy with the contents of the proposed contract.
>
> Please facilitate signing arrangements for the Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea.

Sandline's broad plan was to retrain the Special Forces as quickly as possible and deploy them as a strike force to mount lightening operations against the rebels' jungle sanctuaries. Certain operations would be planned and executed in much the same way as

Duncan had deployed the EO strike teams from Saurimo in Angola and later in Sierra Leone.

To enable the Special Forces to conduct effective operations, Tim asked for utility helicopters that would be used to move troops rapidly over the jungle canopies, and helicopter gunships which would provide close air support and prep landing zones as the need arose. In tandem with this, elements of the country's small army would be retrained and redeployed to ensure stability in Bougainville.

At that time, our men in Sierra Leone were already aware that our contract with the government hung in the balance and that they would probably soon be leaving. There was mounting pressure on the Sierra Leone government to get rid of EO to enable the UN to enter the country and claim success for itself. Of course, things didn't work out as the international community expected them to. They seldom do.

If Tim was able to secure a lasting contract in Papua New Guinea and continue to use EO as a subcontractor, it would suit us very well. A formal decision was thus taken to cooperate if Tim called on us. We would support his project as best we could.

As I was about to leave for the Middle East, I advised Lafras and Nic to maintain constant contact with Tim and begin preparations for mobilising the men that he might require. I also asked them to do their own initial research into the situation in PNG, conduct open source information gathering, and be prepared to move there at short notice. Lafras and Nic had by then already completed most of the planning that would be required to support Sandline's PNG project.

Tim called Nic van den Bergh in early January 1997 and asked if he would be prepared to accept the role of 'operational ground commander' in PNG. Tim explained that his job would be to liaise with General Singirok and his staff to ensure the smooth execution of the plan. Nic agreed after discussing the matter with Lafras.

A few days later, Nic and a ten-man advance party flew to Singapore en route to PNG's capital and main port, Port Moresby. They would later be joined by another group of 30 men. Tim had told them he had arranged for them to be met by a Special Forces commander who would see them through immigration and customs.

At Singapore's Changi Airport, the first sign of the looming problems regarding Sandline's PNG project reared its ugly head. At the Air New Guinea check-in counter the men were prevented from boarding the connecting flight to Port Moresby as they did not have visas for entry into PNG. The check-in personnel in Singapore weren't interested in their pleas for the rules to be bent, and insisted that rules were rules. It appeared Tim's arrangements hadn't been arranged.

Nic immediately telephoned Tim who, in turn, called the Deputy Prime Minister of PNG and asked for his assistance. As Tim recalled:

They phoned me and I phoned Chris Haiveta. Getting them onto that flight took a personal call from the Deputy Prime Minister of PNG to the check-in desk at Singapore Airport.

When they finally arrived at Port Moresby, Tim had to return to London so he left Nic in charge of the contractual documents, urging him to get them signed as soon as possible —something Tim ought to have done.

Achieving this was easier said than done as Tim had not given Nic much information. Nic didn't know where to start or who to approach, so he was shunted from office to office and official to official, with no one knowing what to do. The final signatures were essential because without them no funds could be released for the implementation of Sandline's proposal.

Back in Pretoria, a very frustrated Lafras explained to me what was happening.

I was furious when I heard about this development. Apart from his poorly- planned travel arrangements for our men, Tim wanted a senior EO official to sign a contract on Sandline's behalf. I could not accept that idea; in my mind he was asking us to fraudulently represent a company we had no part of.

"This is a complete mess. What the hell was Tim thinking? I think you'd better call Nic and ask if there's anything we can do to help. If necessary, one of us should fly to PNG except we won't know who to speak to or what to do any more than Nic does," I said to Lafras.

"This is a lesson we must never forget," said Lafras, "From now on we don't accept sub-contracts from anyone unless we have seen the signed documents and all arrangements are in place and confirmed."

I had a bad feeling about what might happen next and I voiced my concerns to Lafras.

"You worry too much," he said with a laugh. "Forget it—I'll sort it out." Eventually someone managed to contact Tim and he returned to PNG in a hurry.

That same day, he managed to get the documents signed by the Deputy Prime Minister and the funds were released—much to everyone's relief. I, however, felt that this was something Tim ought to have done instead of trying to pass the buck.

In a move that surprised us all, Tim then left for a few days' holiday in Mauritius, leaving Nic in overall command of the work in PNG with very few guidelines. Instead, Nic would have to make them up as he went.

When I heard this, I was incredulous. Tim had effectively dumped the entire Sandline project into Nic's lap and hadn't even stayed to confirm that things were going according to the projections he had given the PNG government. This didn't seem to affect Nic too much though. In Tim's absence, he and his men set about entrenching themselves, and began training the first elements of the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) Special Forces.

As Tim later wrote:

I returned to PNG where matters were at last reaching a climax. We had the first of four arms shipments in, the training team and Special Forces people were arriving, and the SFU (Special Forces unit) training was well under way. It was all looking good—and we were still only in January, with time in hand before the elections. We had now established an office at Jackson Airport, where most of our people were to be accommodated before they moved up to carry out advanced jungle training at Wewak, where we would stay with the local battalion of the PNGDF.

Back in Pretoria, I received numerous telephone calls from people purporting to be journalists. For some strange reason, many of them didn't want to give me their names or tell me which newspapers they represented. I suspected these calls were being made by Military Intelligence[386] officers. The callers all had the same question: Why were we killing women and children in Angola, Sierra Leone, and Indonesia? As before, they claimed their material came from 'undisclosed government sources'. I was livid. However, it was clear to me that no matter what I said or did, I would never be believed.

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While Nic and his men were busy with the final operational planning in Papua New Guinea, the aircraft were being readied to fly out to Wewak for the Special Forces' advanced jungle training.

Then the entire plan was compromised by the Australian Assistant Military Attaché in Port Moresby. What he'd seen had made him curious, and he'd started scratching around to find out what was going on. His findings were promptly reported to his superiors in Canberra and subsequently leaked to the media.

On 7 February 1997, the story broke in the Australian media and it was flashed around the world.

Nico Palm was alarmed at the news; if the situation in PNG escalated out of control EO would be blamed as usual. I, however, was not unduly concerned. We were subcontracted to Sandline and I was silently confident that Tim had already prepared a press release that would remedy any negative effects. I was more concerned about Nic and his men struggling to get through Singapore on their way back to South Africa for leave as a result of possible fallout.

I called my old friend Jim in Singapore and asked him how things stood there. He said the EO story had appeared in many of the newspapers but he doubted the authorities would set much store by media reports; it wasn't their style. He warned, though, that they would come down heavily on anyone breaking any laws or moving through their airports with contraband.

With that, I decided to leave Tim and Lafras to worry about PNG—I had enough other problems to contend with. After all, we were only sub-contractors and in essence, we were only responsible for the implementation and execution of certain elements of Tim's plan.

The media thought otherwise: they had been fed the story that Sandline and Executive Outcomes were interlinked in some sinister way—whatever that might have implied. We nevertheless issued a press release stating that we were merely working as sub-contractors to Sandline, and that questions were to be referred directly to Sandline.

In PNG, Tim frantically performed his own damage-control. As a professional soldier, he ought to have realised the value of planning, and should have known how rapidly negative media and false allegations would escalate into an uncontainable situation. He opted to meet with the Australian High Commissioner, David Irvine, and have it out with him.

As Tim later told it:

... the Australian government were totally opposed to our plans. David Irvine could understand what we were doing but his government in Canberra got everything out of proportion and did not want the Bougainville operation to happen. I still don't know why. The only thing I can think of is that they had some reason for allowing the rebel campaign to continue. The only other possible explanation is that they were embarrassed because they had failed to support a friendly nation in its hour of need and were now sulking because this nation had finally sought and found help elsewhere, and, even worse, a private enterprise was now lending a hand.

The extensive media coverage not only blew Sandline's project—it exploded it out of all proportion. Speculations led to further speculations which fuelled a tide of falsehoods that steadily alerted the BRA to the fact that something was going to happen. The vital element of surprise had now been irretrievably lost.

What really boggled my mind was that some of the South African journalists who had been so quick to condemn us for aiding the PNG government started asking me where 'that place' was during their diligent research. Either they had forgotten to take a glance at a world map or didn't understand how to read one.

Unable and unwilling to speak on behalf of Sandline, I contacted its office in London and asked them to issue a press release explaining the situation. They didn't and thus opened the door to more media speculation.

Tim Spicer's apparent reluctance to deal with the media placed me under enormous pressure. I was not even privy to his agreement with the PNG government but I was nevertheless coming under fire.

Furious about what I considered to be Tim's poor planning, and in the hope of shutting the media up, I issued a press release on 25 February 1997:

Sandline International, the UK-based military consultancy company specialising in the provision of advice and problem resolution for legitimate governments and international organisations, sub-contracted Executive Outcomes to assist with a contract recently awarded in Papua New Guinea.

The claims in several news reports that the contract is to 'mount a covert military operation against rebel leaders' by means of a 'surgical strike' were dismissed in a media release on 24 February 1997 by the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan as 'inaccurate and sensationalist'.

Executive Outcomes was sub-contracted along with other professional and reputable private companies, to provide consultancy assistance, aircraft, equipment, and specialist training to the government of Papua New Guinea.

The Defence White Paper of the Papua New Guinea government published in November 1996 stated the intention of the Government to reorganise, retrain, and re-equip the PNG Defence force. In order to maximise the value for the country, the PNG government has decided to make use of external assistance. Executive Outcomes was sub-

contracted to train the PNG Security Forces as part of the many faceted strategy to reach a lasting solution to the nine-year old crisis in Bougainville.

Executive Outcomes will give no further comment at this stage.

I again contacted Sandline's offices, forwarded them a copy of my press release, and advised them to urgently issue their own as I would no longer attempt to do damage-control on their behalf.

Despite their initial reluctance, they finally issued a press release on 28 February:

There has been considerable press speculation in Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea (PNG) about the role of Sandline International in PNG. Some of this reporting has been accurate, some ill-informed.

Sandline International felt it would be appropriate to clarify a number of issues at this stage, to assist accurate reporting in the future.

Sandline has been contracted by the Government of PNG to do the following:

- Train elements of the PNG Defence Force.
- Provide technical support.
- Provide specialists to operate equipment and train members of the PNG Defence Force in its use.
- Provide advice on strategic planning and Command and Control.

This contract came about after lengthy negotiation over a nine month period, during which time the Government of PNG carried out due diligence on the company. The contract was finally ratified in the first week of February 1997. Sandline draws its expertise from ex-military personnel from a number of countries. The criteria are experience and professional standards. The aim is to provide the best service to clients. Sandline will only work for legitimate governments, preferably those democratically elected.

Each contract is considered on its merits and a judgement is made by the Sandline board. Sandline does not seek official endorsements for its operations from any government, and should not be considered as having any formal sanction from any government than those it is contracted to.

Sandline applies the same professional standards and levels of discipline as one would naturally expect from a modern first world army.

Sandline is not a subsidiary or in any way corporately linked to the South African company Executive Outcomes (EO). However, Sandline takes the view that EO is a professional, capable, and respectable company and Sandline will subcontract them when appropriate.

With regard to speculation concerning an approach to the medical services of North Queensland, the situation is as follows—Sandline has a professional duty to its employees to ensure that medical cover is the best available. In all aspects of realistic military training, there is an ever present risk of injury or disease. The climate and arduous terrain

of PNG exacerbate this. To that end Sandline management instructed one of our medical personnel to make a full survey of regional medical services available. This approach was precautionary and is normal planning procedure.

General Singirok had meanwhile flown to Singapore and the Philippines where he had met 'someone' or 'some organisation', and hatched a treacherous plan.

The relationship between the governments of Australia and PNG became increasingly strained, and Australia threatened to suspend all aid to PNG in the light of Sandline's activities. There were also threats of economic sanctions against the government of PNG. Australia's foreign economic interests were of more importance than PNG's security interests.

When the Australian government invited Sir Julius Chan to Canberra for crisis talks he turned to Tim for advice. Tim quite correctly told him that it was 'a matter for him (Sir Julius)' but PNG was a sovereign country and he could not see why the Australians should have been 'permitted to interfere or dictate his policy'.

With the pressure mounting, Sir Julius even considered severing diplomatic relations with Australia.

Since Executive Outcomes wasn't in a position to contribute much more to the escalating debate, Chris Grové and I flew to Abu Dhabi to attend the International Defence Exhibition (IDEX).

I was convinced that Tim Spicer would eventually resolve the problems and that, in time, PNG would disappear from the media's radar. I wondered, however, how long it would take for the press to make us the scapegoat for the crisis in PNG.

In the event, it was not too long.

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In PNG, General Singirok scheduled a meeting for the evening of 16 March 1997 at 19:00, during which Tim, Nic van den Bergh and Carl Dietz,[387] were to present both the intelligence and operational aspects of the final plan for stabilising Bougainville to him. Concerned that he might be held up at a previously arranged 17:00 meeting with the Prime Minister, Tim advised Nic to go ahead with the appointment and offer his apologies for being late.

What none of the men could possibly have known was that Singirok had planned the meeting to lure them into his headquarters and have them arrested. Nic and Carl were immediately detained, as was Tim when he appeared after his meeting with Sir Julius Chan.

With Tim, Nic, and Carl in custody, things started to happen rather quickly.

The Executive Outcomes team at Wewak was flown back to Port Moresby, unaware of what had happened. They saw the move back to the capital as merely another delaying tactic, something they had become used to. They were very wrong, however, and on their arrival in Port Moresby they were also detained.

One of the men later recounted the experience to me:

When we were told to move back to Port Moresby from Wewak, we thought it was just another Singirok-Spicer fuck-up. They had, after all, seemed quite unconcerned about what was happening on the ground, and Spicer had been quite happy to pass the buck to us for everything. Imagine our surprise when we were all arrested when we arrived in Port Moresby. We soon formulated some of our own escape plans but fortunately we didn't have to use them.

Tim was imprisoned on a boat in the harbour and Nic and the rest of the men on subcontract were placed under effective house arrest elsewhere.

Tim Spicer, Sandline's CEO, was arrested in Papua New Guinea (photo: Agence France-Presse)

As the mutiny became public knowledge, Prime Minister Chan relieved General Singirok of his command. Singirok, however, maintained that he was still the commander of the PNGDF and, after refusing to step down, transferred the EO men to Tarama Barracks.

The attempted sacking of Singirok[388] was exploited to the maximum in the media and it sparked civilian protests which degenerated into rioting and looting across the island. In an effort to ease the rising tension, Sir Julius was forced to terminate the Sandline contract.

The men briefly saw Tim as they were about to be deported on 20 March. All the EO men were allowed to leave, but Singirok had ordered that Tim should remain behind. When I heard this I felt sorry for him but I was relieved that our men were safe and on their way back to South Africa.

On 21 March, The Daily Telegraph, under the headline, 'Mutineers hold British mercenaries', stated:

Sandline denies that its personnel are mercenaries and insists that it is not a subsidiary of Executive Outcomes, a South African-based operation that offers 'specialist military expertise' to governments with internal security problems, such as Sierra Leone and Angola.

However, Lt-Col Spicer has said Sandline has 'subcontracted' some work in Papua New Guinea to the South African company.

Initially kept under guard but later released to the care of the British High Commission, Tim was left to eat the dust of his own poor planning and Singirok's treachery.

Our men arrived back in South Africa on 22 March.

On 15 April, ABC News reported that 'money for a military operation on Bougainville was spent on parties, vehicles, and renovations to the Defence Force Commander's residence in Port Moresby.'

The Sydney Morning Herald expanded on Singirok's lavish spending of defence funds. In an article titled 'Revelations tarnish a national hero', it said:

General Singirok's military record was severely blemished by a series of military disasters last year including the much-publicised failure of a 410 million[389] offensive against the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and the massacre of twelve army personnel at Kangu Beach in a 'payback' attack three months later. Government's disquiet over the commander's activities intensified when in November a coronial inquiry blamed soldiers for the murder of the Bougainville Premier, Mr Theodore Miriung, in October.

General Singirok finally stormed out of the inquiry on Wednesday after Mr Cooke accused him of lying when he told troops in early March that 'the Sandline issue has got us all by surprise'.

In the aftermath of Singirok's duplicity and treachery, Sir Julius Chan followed the only honourable course of action left to him; falling on his sword, he stepped down as prime minister.

We had all learnt a bitter lesson and I realised that what had happened to Tim Spicer and Sandline could just as easily have happened to us. It also proved to me that the value of in-depth planning—along with contingency planning—should never be underestimated.

I could only speculate about Singirok's motives. Despite his military facade he was a weak man, easily influenced by others and open to pressure (not least from Chan's political opponents) and bribe money. He also spent money excessively.

It later transpired that other military companies had been seeking involvement in PNG. We had already discovered that, during a visit to London, Singirok's hotel bills had been paid by a private military company. Self-interest, greed, and political ambition had clearly played a part in his actions. He had been careful to dress them up in moral justifications but he had let his guard slip in a conversation later repeated to me by Michael Grunberg:

I spoke to General Singirok and his wife during the five-day period when the Sandline team were incarcerated, and I clearly recall him saying: 'The Sandline contract has given me the perfect opportunity to create a constitutional crisis'.

A few months later Singirok's true underlying motive was exposed: He had been paid £31 000—a fortune in PNG terms—deposited into a secret bank account by UK arms

dealer, J & S Franklin. Singirok had orchestrated public anger over the Sandline contract by alleging that every member of the PNG government involved— except of course himself—had received a bribe. It was now apparent that the only one who had actually accepted bribes had been Singirok himself.

Singirok 'paid by arms firm'

No conflict of interest, says ex-army boss

SINGIROK'S $70,000 SECRET

The media finally exposed Brigadier General Singirok's true motives for his turn-about regarding Sandline's contract (photo: Asia-Pacific Network)

Ironically, this same British company—J & S Franklin—had (according to the Sierra Leone TRC) sub-contracted the ill-fated mission of the Ghurkha Security Guards in Sierra Leone. It was as the leader of this group that Major Bob Mackenzie had been killed.

On 26 August 1999, Pacnews ran the following report:

Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, admits Australia ignored Papua New Guinea, but the 1997 Sandline mercenary crisis reminded Australia that PNG was an important partner in development.

The Foreign Minister made the comments in Canberra at the launch of a book on the Sandline affair by Pacific journalist Mary-Louise O' Callaghan.

The fallout from Sandline's operation in Papua New Guinea would be exploited by all and sundry.

A report by Wayne Madsen on 12 August 2005, stated:

Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption later revealed that on February 5, 1997, $18 million to finance the Papua New Guinea coup was transferred to Sandline's account at the Hong Kong and Shanghai bank (account number 600774426). The account holders were listed as Simon Mann, Lafras Luitingh (of Executive Outcomes), Eeben Barlow (of Executive Outcomes), and Anthony L. R. Buckingham (of Executive Outcomes and Branch Energy), The money was traced to the Hong Kong-based Jardine Matheson Group, which had significant gold and oil interests in Papua New

Guinea and also had a strategic partnership with Kroll Associates' murky London operation. After the $18 million of the $36 million contract was transferred to Port Moresby, it simply vanished, according to the Hong Kong Commission.

I couldn't understand how Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption could have listed Lafras and I as signatories to the Sandline Account. I was certainly never informed about having been given signing powers—unless our names had later been added without our knowledge. I asked to see my authorised signature on the account. I never got a response.

The Australian judiciary was equally quick to exploit the situation to their benefit and cast a sinister shadow over the Sandline operation:

Papua New Guinea's Judicial Commission headed by Australian Justice Warwick John Andrew tied all the players together in his ruling, 'The controllers of Sandline International are obviously Mr Buckingham, Mr. [Michael] Grunberg [of Diamond Works], and at least to some extent Mr. Spicer ... There is a strong inference that Sandline Holdings Limited may be something of a joint venture between the interests of Mr Buckingham and the interests of Mr Barlow and Executive Outcomes... The information provided by Sandline Holdings that they are entirely separate from Executive Outcomes cannot be correct, but the exact nature of their relationship seems clouded behind a web of interlocking companies whose ownership is difficult to trace.

Once more I could only marvel at how wrong the claims were—Tony Buckingham and I had most certainly never had a 'joint venture' as was inferred by Justice Andrew. I could only assume that he too had been fed erroneous and misleading information—or that he had purposely lied to protect someone else.

A recent photo of disgraced Brigadier General Singirok (photo: Wakaphotos.com)

After that, Papua New Guinea would forever be associated with Sandline and Executive Outcomes. I was unlikely to ever forget the place either, as I considered it EO's greatest failure—and I detest failure.

Others, however, felt differently about the disgraced Brigadier Jerry Singirok's treachery.

Sometime after I had left Executive Outcomes, Nico Palm forwarded me a fax message dated 27 May 1998. It had been sent from France by a man who identified himself as 'Cody', and it read as follows:

Intelligence report for Executive Outcomes and Sandline, DSL. I have been retained by PNG Bill Skates [Skate[390] formed a government after the resignation of Sir Julius Chan], to infiltrate and exterminate key personnel in these companies. Anyone who Skates [sic] deems threatening to his government. I have not received my reputation by being stupid. I realise such task would be very harmful not only to PNG but many other country's [sic] as well.

As you know PNG has no intention of fulfilling the remaining contract funds to Sandline.

List of Targets: Tim Spicer, Eeben Barlow, Michael Grunberg and Bernie McCabe I would prefer to offer my services to you not PNG.

I would have loved to have had 'Cody' around for coffee—if only to give him a lesson in English. I also advised Nico simply to ignore the threat as it was apparent that 'Cody' thought his fax would scare us into paying him money to refrain from harming us.

His second fax, sent on 9 June, said (in his quaint pidgin English):

Well I guess due to your MD none response, I will have to carry out the PNG request!

I am a fare [sic] man so good luck and let the game begin.

Clearly unable to grasp why the company had not cowered in fear and leapt at his threat/offer, 'Cody' sent another fax a day later:

PNG will pay me $100 000 for my service, but I am a businessman and everything is negotiable. I work for the highest bidder, and will turn the tables for that reason. Make me an offer. This is the last correspondence from me.

'Cody' and Skate had not yet learnt that we would not be intimidated. We had been threatened by people far worse than the likes of them.

We never heard from 'Cody' again.

41:
Executive Outcomes at IDEX '97

As the crisis in Papua New Guinea was spiralling out of control, Chris Grové and I arrived in Abu Dhabi to represent Executive Outcomes at a defence exhibition. This was the first exhibition of its kind EO had attended as an independent exhibitor.

Although we'd had a limited presence at COPEX[391] '95 and COPEX '96, we had never really seen these as dedicated marketing platforms. We had simply piggy- backed on other exhibitors and suppliers we were friendly with.

The International Defence Exhibition (more commonly known as IDEX) was held over the period 16-20 March 1997 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). At the time, IDEX was considered the premier defence showcase for the Middle East and Asia, a region that accounted for 60% of the world's defence spending. Its rapid rise had been no accident: the UAE had committed massive financial and other resources in its quest to develop the perfect defence exhibition location. In addition, the UAE was viewed as a key link between the markets and manufacturers of the West and the countries of the Gulf and beyond.

IDEX attracts international buyers and sellers of military products and services (photo: Dotemirates.com)

IDEX was the brainchild of the UAE Defence Forces and was organised by its Military Committee for International Defence Exhibitions (CODEX). This professional and dedicated team (chaired by Brigadier Sultan OB Al Suwaidi) had promoted their exhibition extensively at the Eurosatory and Farnborough military shows, both highly regarded defence showcases.

IDEX '97 was a large exhibition. It had in excess of 600 companies from more than 40 countries participating and the Sultan and his staff expected it to draw at least 40 000 visitors.

Nico Palm and Chris Grové had discussed the possibility of Executive Outcomes attending IDEX 97 as an exhibitor with me as far back as November 1996. As it was viewed as a perfect opportunity from which to launch business into the Middle and Far East, I agreed.

Then the work started: we needed to produce a professional stall backdrop for our exhibition booth, print pamphlets, arrange travel and hotels, get visas, and recreate our corporate video. It was trying but fun, and we had many a good laugh at some of the mistakes we made in our preparations.

We roped Kallie Coetzee in to help develop a revised video for the company. Chris and Nico would take responsibility for shipping our marketing material over and making other arrangements for things that had to be in place before we arrived in Abu Dhabi.

During this period, I was approached by Mark Stucke, a South African based in London. Stucke was a producer for Journeyman Productions, a UK-based film and documentary group. He claimed that he had read everything on Executive Outcomes and wished to set the record straight as far as all the misrepresentations were concerned. Although I had heard that story several times, I agreed to give him some of my time. He informed me that he was coincidentally also going to IDEX '97.

I should have realised then what he was really up to—but I didn't and if the alarm bells were ringing, I certainly wasn't listening. What I didn't know at the time—and only found out much later—was that Stucke had some very good friends in the South African Military Intelligence community who (directly and indirectly) had given him a lot of 'background information' on Executive Outcomes—along with some money to 'ease his stay'. As usual the background information consisted of fiction, speculation, conjecture, and lies.

By mid-March, we were ready to ship our small container to Abu Dhabi.

Chris and I had, for some inexplicable reason, confused the dates as a result of which we arrived in Abu Dhabi the day IDEX '97 was due to begin. We were hopping mad at ourselves for this silly error but managed to get ourselves ready for the expected throngs of visitors in record time. We were, however, under no illusions about the kind of hostility we would encounter from the media and some of the other exhibitors.

On the morning of 17 March I got the news that Tim Spicer, Nic van den Bergh, and Carl Dietz had been arrested in PNG along with the other members of the Sandline and EO teams. I put it down to bad reporting but it kept niggling at the back of my mind. My main concern was: are our men okay?

Over the next few days, we met with numerous representatives from governments and armed forces from across the globe. Most African visitors expressed their disappointment and surprise about how the South African government had shunned us. Others complimented us on the work we were doing. Some openly accused our government of supporting anarchy in Africa in a manner far worse than what the old apartheid government had. It was difficult for Chris and I to keep our mouths shut, but we did.

It made me realise that perceptions and misperceptions govern reality, as many people are unable to connect the dots—or simply don't want to.

Our time at IDEX '97 was anything but boring. Even though we were far away from South Africa, we had enemies all around us.

Stucke asked if he could install a mini-camera and sound equipment to record the kind of people who approached us. I gave my permission; we would certainly not be discussing any real business with potential clients in the exhibition hall. As the world's largest defence supermarket, it was only a contact and networking point. Any promising prospects would be dealt with later in private. We had nothing to hide.

Shortly after we had set up our stand, ex-French Army General de Corps D' Armee (CR) Jean Varret from the company SOFMA ambled across to talk about where we were working, what we were doing, and the type of trouble we had encountered in South Africa. He wanted to know if we had been approached by Stucke filmed this encounter and others, and subsequently slapped the sequences together as a documentary which he sold as a 'scoop'. In his endeavours to ingratiate himself with his backers, he falsely claimed that he had shot the footage secretly.

He also made what he considered to be another major expose.[392] As the events in PNG unfolded, he would stick his camera in my face and attempt to interrogate me. He never realised how close he came to getting smacked in the nose.

During IDEX, South Africa's then Defence Minister, the late Joe Modise, sauntered through the hall where we had set up our stand. He was ostensibly there to meet manufactures and suppliers of the type of equipment the new SANDF would potentially need for defence in the future. Modise acted as though we had leprosy when he passed our stand, refusing to even greet us. I followed him and finally confronted him.

"Hello, Mister Minister," I said. "Why didn't you acknowledge us?" "Don't talk to me," he snapped abruptly.

"Why not?" I asked, "Are you ashamed that someone might see us? Or are you only interested in people who are willing to bow and scrape to you? After all, we are South Africans and our worst crime has been helping your supposed allies and so- called friends —the Angolans."

Modise didn't answer and stormed off. Everyone within earshot heard our brief discussion.

"Just ignore him—he seems to have no idea what is going on in the real world," an adjacent exhibitor remarked.

Several African military officers, having overheard my discussion with Modise, expressed their astonishment at Modise's attitude towards us.

"You have done more to help Africa than your government has—they should be grateful to you!" one of the officers said as he shook my hand.

Modise died just in time for his own good. Shortly afterwards the South African government placed huge orders for defence equipment and Modise was identified as having been one of the main beneficiaries of multi-million rand bribes paid by European contractors.

Later that day, an IDEX messenger approached our stand and informed me that my presentation of a discussion paper would commence in 30 minutes. As we had not booked a slot to present a paper, I went to see the coordinator of the hall where such presentations

were held. I wanted to get to the bottom of what appeared to be either a misunderstanding or an attempt to embarrass the company.

Someone had indeed booked a presentation slot under Executive Outcomes' name. Apparently I had asked to present a paper titled, 'Making war in Africa.'

"I'm sorry, but neither I nor my colleague booked this slot, let alone such a topic," I told the coordinator.

"One of your people certainly did, Mister Barlow," he assured me.

I asked the officer to show me who in my company had made the arrangements. Walking through the various exhibitors' halls, he pointed out an official at the Denel stand. Not content with the damage they had already done by providing weapons to anti-government forces in Africa, Denel's officials were determined to make their own mischief at IDEX.

It was sad that these so-called businessmen from South Africa had elected to pull a stunt like that. Apart from having been caught out trying to embarrass us, it showed their extreme lack of professionalism and misplaced arrogance—something that would manifest itself even more dramatically in the coming years when their traditional markets started drying up, as evidence of their bribery, corruption, entitlement, and support to anti-government and terror groups in Africa was exposed in the public domain.

Chris and I were visited by numerous soldiers from across the world, many of them asking how they could join the company. They came from the US, the UK, Germany, France, Pakistan, India, Russia and other countries.

During this time the ill-fated Sandline International project in Papua New Guinea reached its climax and the media continued to claim that Sandline International and Executive Outcomes were one and the same company.

I eventually did present a paper at IDEX—on the function and role of Executive Outcomes. My audience consisted mainly of military men who, after the presentation, approached me to discuss possible cooperation. To a man, they all complimented my men and the company. Afterwards, several African military officers again approached me and thanked me for the work EO was doing in Africa.

Also in attendance, but hiding out of sight, was a journalist working for Time magazine.

The article written by Adam Zagorin appeared in the 26 May 1997 issue of Time under the headline, 'Soldiers for Hire'.

He wrote:

The company logo, a metallic blue chessboard knight, rears across the screen and unseats an opposing king. As the corporate promo continues, scenes of military derring-do flit by and a voice-over extols Executive Outcomes Ltd's product line: low-intensity conflict, sniper and Special Forces training, rapid deployment, tank warfare. At the podium is Eeben Barlow, military marketer extraordinaire. A slim, fair-haired 40 year old, he is chief executive of Executive Outcomes ... one of the world's leading purveyors of private military muscle ... Holstered on one hip is a cell phone, on the other a Czech-made revolver.

...Executive Outcomes has brokered the sale of, or leased on behalf of clients, tens of millions of dollars' worth of military equipment, including the Soviet MiG-23 and MiG-27 fighter aircraft and Mi-17 and Mi-24 transport-and-attack helicopters'.

Zagorin, it seemed, had an obligation to concoct false information about me and the company. Not only was I not carrying a gun (least of all a 'Czech-made revolver') I didn't even have my cell phone with me. We had also never brokered any sale of equipment to any government. But, Zagorin, like many others before him and many who would follow, was not prepared to let the truth get in the way of a good lie.

On our return to South Africa a few days later, I received a letter from the organisers of IDEX asking if I had indeed been armed during my presentation, and saying that I would have contravened the laws of the UAE in the event. I shredded the letter and didn't even bother to respond.

With correspondents like Zagorin writing for it, it is no small wonder that Time magazine has come under its fair share of attack for erroneous, false, and unbalanced reporting.

After the exhibition, the Jane's Group published a supplement to Jane's Intelligence Review and Jane's Sentinel. Titled Pointer, this supplement commented on Executive Outcomes' presence at IDEX 97 under the headline of 'New World Armies'. Paul Beaver wrote:

To increase its already substantial profile, Executive Outcomes recently took up exhibition space at IDEX 97 in Abu Dhabi. There Barlow spoke to Pointer. 'We're only prepared to work for stable governments recognised by the United Nations or for multinational companies ...'

Barlow's presence at the show did not suit the South African government, however. A senior official told local Emirates media that he had not seen the exhibition stand and said he did not believe Executive Outcomes was there.

The response to Executive Outcomes and Barlow is not always an adverse one, however. 'We really wonder if he might have something', said a senior Western diplomat in Abu Dhabi. 'After all, the UN doesn't have the resources...so perhaps privatisation—with strict controls—is the best way forward for Africa'.

By then I had lost interest in what was being said about us. It struck me as odd, though, that a senior South African government minister claimed not to have seen our stand and did not believe we had been there, despite me having confronted him. Similarly, Denel officials had deliberately tried to embarrass both myself and EO at an international defence exhibition. Lying and game playing seemed to be their forte. They would, in the coming years, virtually destroy South Africa's defence manufacturing capabilities. Yet, they would never be held accountable.

Adam Zagorin of Time magazine conjured up his own lies on EO (Photo www.pogo.org)

42:
Blowing the Lid off Past Operations

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created by the Government of National Unity under the leadership of President Nelson Mandela. Its aim was to help South Africans deal with—and come to terms with—crimes that had been committed under the National Party government's apartheid system and the so-called liberation struggle.

The conflict during that period had resulted in violence and human-rights abuses from all sides of the political divide. No political grouping or section of South African society escaped those abuses.

The Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, said, '...a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.'

As erstwhile operational commander for the CCB's Region 5—albeit years earlier— it was very obvious that I would come under the spotlight as the TRC progressed in its work, thanks to the intelligence community having compromised me. That I was also the founder and chairman of Executive Outcomes made the spotlight shine even more brightly, and the allegations against me flew in thick and fast.

By early 1997 a number of wild and unsubstantiated claims regarding my CCB activities had appeared in the media.

The following is an extract of testimony that was tabled at the TRC:

Date (of murder): 29-03-1988. Place: Paris (France).

Name of victim: Dulcie September.[393] Address of victim: Val-de-Mame, France. Sex of victim: Female, aged 45 years. Marital status: Unmarried.

Born: Cape Town.

Position of victim: Chief representative of the ANC in France (and also of Switzerland and Luxembourg). Arrived in Paris in 1983. Head of the ANC Information Bureau in France (Monde 31/3/88)

Under paragraph 5, the following appeared:

4. Eeben Barlow (see Notes *5) seems at the time of Dulcie September's assassination[394] to have headed the CCB's Western Europe region. He operated out of Frankfurt (Germany). DS's (Dulcie September's) assassination, was according to Ellis, almost certainly directed by Barlow as CCB desk officer for Europe. (Eeben Barlow seems to deny this although an informant told me that Barlow allegedly once received an order to kill Dulcie September, but that his section refused because she wasn't a military target).

The allegations continued:

Case: Godfrey. Date: 1987–1988.
Place: Brussels, Belgium
Name of victim: Godfrey Motsepe
Address of victim: ANC office: Raadstraat 25, Brussels, Belgium. Sex of victim: Male
Race of victim: Black Age of victim: Adult
Position of victim: ANC representative in Brussels for Belgium and the Netherlands. Motsepe had been posted to Brussels for eight years (from 1980?). Crime Activities:

In 1987 two men directly threatened him. One was armed with a pistol equipped with a silencer (SS-28); petty sabotage (letters vanishing in the post or arriving torn up in the letterbox of the ANC's office).

4 or 5/2/88 2 shots fired through the window of the room in which Godfrey Motsepe was working. The shots narrowly missed him, although his ear was cut by splinters.

27/3/88 A 17kg bomb is discovered at the offices of the ANC in Brussels office (2 days before the murder of Dulcie September in Paris (See case Dulcie September).

The chain of command was alleged to have been as follows:

Speaking about the murder of Dulcie September Stephen Ellis[395] (Int. Ellis) believed such an operation in a major Western European capital had to be cleared at very high levels; at least State Security Council or the Ministry of Defence (then Magnus Malan). The same could be true for this case. If so, this assassination was almost certainly directed by Eeben Barlow as CCB desk officer for Europe (Notes 4). General Marius Oelschig, as a Senior Military Representative must have had some knowledge of this affair.

These false and irresponsible allegations were so bizarre that I actually found them a little funny, but I didn't find the forum on which they had been introduced funny at all. A lot of the people at the TRC were desperately trying to find out what had happened to family and friends…on both sides of the then conflict.

It was obvious that people were lying under oath behind closed doors. I had a good idea, though, where the disinformation would have originated: Military Intelligence.

As Stephen Ellis seemed to know so much about my alleged CCB operations, I assumed he had a very cosy relationship with the South African intelligence community.

Stephen Ellis had a lot to say about my past, indicating a very cosy relationship with the South African intelligence services (photo: Maandblad Zuid-Afrika)

There was even an allegation that I had been behind the suicide bombing of the US embassy in Beirut in 1983. Despite the severity of this allegation, I could only shake my head. I had indeed been active in the Middle East, and I had rubbed shoulders with operational and intelligence members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Black September—at great risk to myself—but needless to say, I had not been there to kill US civilians or the troops who protected them.

In late January of 1997 I reached a breaking point. I decided I had swallowed enough of MI's lies and smear tactics. It was time to do something about it.

I called a counter-espionage officer who I knew reasonably well.

"Pieter, if your guys don't stop this shit, I'm going to hit you where it hurts", I said. "Please tell your masters that they've been using the media to attack Executive Outcomes for too long. If you don't desist I'm going to drop some real facts and I'm sure the media will be delighted to print them."

Having no idea what I was implying, he laughed.

"You can't hurt us," he said, "We own enough journalists. Anything we say will be snatched up and printed as fact."

"Then let's see how you guys handle an agent of yours being blown." He thought I was bluffing.

"Just remember I warned you," I said.

Pieter knew that I would never have betrayed any of my old agents[396] and he was correct—I would have protected my own agents with my life—but nothing stopped me from blowing agents I had recruited for different sections of MI—especially if those agents weren't working for me. They were about to learn that from my point of view, desperate times called for desperate measures.

MI had apparently forgotten about Cynthia[397] at the US Embassy. The false-flag I had used to recruit her had been maintained. She had been faithfully, although unwittingly, working for MI's CI Operations division, passing on classified and sensitive US information, for all those years. That was about to change…

Nico wasn't convinced that compromising an MI agent in the media would be the best way to halt MI's constant attacks. I was past caring. I wanted them off my back no matter the cost. The lives of my men in the field were worth more to me than their agents—regardless of what information they had access to or how important they were.

I leaked the information about Cynthia's entire recruitment and access to an investigative journalist who was untainted by the petty disinformation games I had become embroiled in. She listened with interest and thought it a great story. Blowing Cynthia in the media would cause some wounds and shock waves throughout the counter-intelligence community. The Americans, on the other hand, would probably downplay the whole thing by saying they'd had her 'under control', before quietly removing her and then burrowing even deeper into South Africa with their deep- cover networks—without counter-intelligence's knowledge.

But could I prove it?

I gave her the proof she wanted and on 27 February 1997 The Sunday Independent ran an article titled 'US Embassy worker was duped into spying for MI'. Those who knew anything about the operation would immediately realise that I was the only possible source.

The US Embassy issued its standard 'no comment' statement.

The South African National Defence Force said it was 'not in a position to comment in any way on this report'.

I knew, however, that my leak had dealt MI's Counter Intelligence Division a massive body blow. I was sure, too, that they would be scrambling around to see if they could lay charges of treason against me, but they would learn that if the fabricated 'secret' MI documentation I had concerning myself and my company were made public, they would be forced to back down.

For once, the pen had proved itself mightier than the sword.

Cynthia worked at the US embassy in Pretoria (photo: Daily Mail)

A serving CI Ops officer called me and in his best English (which was fairly limited and interspersed with blasphemy) demanded to know whose cover I intended to blow next and threatened to charge me under the Official Secrets Act.

"Go ahead. Then you can reveal all the disinformation you have formulated about me and my company using taxpayers' money to the court. If you don't want to show it to the courts I'll do it for you. Any judge will find it very difficult to find me guilty of having your secret lies in my possession," I responded.

"Don't think there won't be consequences," the officer snarled.

"Good. While you are working on those, mention to Helgaard and his front company 'Sonel' that they had better watch out; they are also in the firing line. If you guys don't stop your shit, I'll blow every agent and front company I know about."

With that, MI immediately disappeared off our backs, at least overtly.

I was sure, however, that they would still be passing on their distorted version of myself and EO to DFA and the media. Sadly for us, the DFA still acted with impunity against us and their lies were snapped up by the media as gospel. They were nothing more than civil servants, but they had elevated themselves to dizzying heights and deemed themselves untouchable.

At least we knew who our enemies in South Africa were.

43:
Saudi Arabia

The Institute of Security Studies (ISS), a Midrand-based, donor-sponsored 'think-tank', hosted their monthly security seminar on 20 February 1997. The seminar was titled 'Privatisation of security in Africa'. The ISS facilitators were Dr Jakkie Cilliers (one of our major critics) and Mark Malan (one of his underlings).

Although I had serious misgivings about accepting their offer to state our case, Lafras Luitingh, Nic van den Bergh, and Nico Palm persuaded me to accept the invitation. One of our motivating factors for attending the seminar was the possibility that Rusty Evans of the DFA would be there—he was, after all, listed as an ISS respondent to the Executive Outcomes paper. This would allow me to publicly confront him about the lies and malicious rumours that he and his department had long been passing to the media and international governments.

Various vultures of disinformation and purveyors of lies would also be attending the seminar: the media (en masse), SANDF, SAPS, NIA, SASS, and DFA, and several security companies.

I persuaded the ISS to allow me to change the subject of my discussion slightly to 'Privatisation of peace-keeping in Africa'. They reluctantly agreed.

In my opening remarks, I stated, 'There can be no peace-keeping without peace'. Delivering my paper, I covered ground we had so often raked over with the media and everyone else who expressed an interest in the company: our mission, operating philosophy, client selection, the market we operated in, our support base, and the company's achievements.

It was my opening remarks, however, that set off a media attack—led by Khareen Pech —who saw my presentation as an opportunity to attack me and Executive Outcomes quoting from the UK's highly-secret UK 'Eyes Alpha' disinformation document on EO and several MI disinformation pieces.

I counter-attacked Pech and exposed the fact that she had obtained her so-called intelligence on us by having pilfered the disinformation document from the flat of a British journalist she had shacked up with after having received money to generate disinformation about EO.[398]

I was extremely disappointed that Evans didn't put in an appearance but he probably suspected he would be called on to defend the myriad lies he had disseminated at our expense. I am sure he knew he would find it very difficult to challenge me; I went well armed with reams of paper exposing the disinformation his department had generated.

At least I felt I had vindicated our position vis-a-vis the ISS' agenda on EO as I was able to expose much of their disinformation on a forum they had created. They may have been doing good work for their numerous foreign sponsors, but they had allowed their institute to be used as a platform for launching disinformation on EO and they were themselves clearly acting as a mouthpiece for the anti-EO lobby.[399]

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Early one morning in February 1997 Chris Grové asked for an urgent meeting.

"I have a friend who works in the Saudi Embassy in Hatfield [Pretoria]," he said, "she's the personal assistant to the Saudi Ambassador and he has asked her to establish contact with us. Her name is Petra and she's the daughter of General Roux—a retired SAAF officer."

"Why would he want to meet us, Chris?" I asked, "The Saudis are in bed with the Americans and they can get whatever they want from them,"

"It's to do with training the Saudi National Guard. It seems the Americans aren't always as jacked as they seem to be when it comes to training."

I asked Chris to arrange a meeting, not expecting that he would call a few hours later to tell me it had been set for the following day in a small coffee shop in Hatfield.

I was introduced to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Charge d'Affaires in South Africa, a tall, friendly man named Dr Soud M Zedan. He was accompanied by Petra Roux. After exchanging pleasantries over coffee, he explained his reason for having wanted to meet me.

"You probably know that the Kingdom has had its share of troubles lately. Our problems concern the pilgrims coming to Saudi for the Hajj and then going off to the Holy City of Mecca. Amongst the pilgrims, we are getting a sprinkling of fundamentalist Muslims who go there for the sole purpose of committing acts of terror."

"But how can we be of any assistance?" I asked.

"My government has been closely watching and listening to reports about your company. Despite the negativity in the media—which we don't believe—we think you could make a major difference to our national security, particularly insofar as the National Guard is concerned. Until now we have relied almost entirely on the Americans but we are not getting what we need. Close cooperation exists but they see our internal problems as purely our own business. The responsibility for internal security lies jointly with the police forces and the National Guard. Your company has a reputation for getting the job done which is why I'm speaking to you. Secondly, the Saudi National Guard's Western Deputation is commanded by HRH[400] Prince Faisal. He has instructed me to ask you for a complete proposal for a rapid reaction force to counter terrorist threats in and around Jeddah and Mecca."

I tried not to show too much surprise or excitement and saw that Chris, across the table, also had his poker face on.

"The Kingdom does us a great honour by considering us as a possible resource. How do you want us to approach the presentation to His Highness Prince Faisal?" I asked.

"You just do what it is you do. When you are ready, let me know. I will arrange visas and take care of everything else."

Chris and I returned to the office and discussed the brief. We agreed that it was unusual for the Saudis to request help from sources other than the Americans, but we decided to draft a proposal and see what happened. With the rapid reaction force as our starting point,

we could amend and alter things as they saw fit. I asked Chris to draft the proposal. I would check it, make any necessary adjustments, and then return it to him for printing and binding.

Chris' produced an excellent and well-thought out working concept document.

We were soon ready to meet Dr Zedan again for a brief coordinating meeting to discuss our approach to the visit as well as any advice he thought might be helpful. My main concern was the negative publicity the company was still attracting, especially in South Africa. This was the first matter I raised at the meeting.

"Excellency, I'm concerned about how these reports might affect our forthcoming meetings, particularly with the National Guard officers."

He assured me this would pose no problems for EO in the kingdom; the Kingdom did not trust the South African media—or any other media for that matter.

Chris briefed Dr Zedan on our understanding of the problem and our intended approach, and presented several possible options. I discussed the mechanics that would be involved in line with the concept proposal that Chris had set out.

We arrived in Jeddah, capital city of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in late March 1997. We were met at the airport by Captain Hamoud Al-Terifi, an assistant to HRH Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Ali Saud, commander of the Royal Saudi National Guard, Western Deputation (RSNG-WD). Captain Hamoud whisked us through the immigration and customs formalities and drove us to the Marriott Hotel in Palestine Road. After checking in we were told to unpack and relax until further notice.

Jeddah's Corniche on the Red Sea (photo: Pinterest.com)

We settled into our rooms and Chris and I again went through our presentations and discussed every possible scenario we could think of, given the limited information provided by Dr Zedan.

The following morning we were driven to the RSNG-WD HQ and ushered upstairs to the offices of Brigadier Sultan Turki Bin Rabian. The brigadier, a short, portly, elderly man with a twinkle in his eye, spent some minutes welcoming us to Saudi Arabia and filling our cups with strong Saudi coffee which we would have been impolite to refuse.

Eventually the brigadier got down to business and asked if we were ready to present our proposal.

"Good, we will talk about it tomorrow," he said before we had time to answer. "First I must introduce you to his Royal Highness Prince Faisal. There will be plenty of time to talk later."

He escorted us to Prince Faisal's offices and briefly introduced us to HRH, after which we returned to his office for more coffee. A few hours later we were driven back to the hotel, frustrated about not having been able to present our proposal. We hadn't intended spending more than a day or two in the Kingdom; we both had a lot of work that required our attention in Pretoria.

Chris Grove (left) and the author with HRH Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Ali Saud, commander of RSNG-WD

The following morning, we were subjected to much the same procedure once again: we were collected from the hotel, driven to the RSNG-WD HQ, welcomed with several cups of coffee, and got nowhere. We were advised that we would be able to present our proposal the following day.

And so it was that the next day we were once more collected from the hotel, driven to the RSNG-WD HQ, welcomed, and given lots of coffee… but we were finally able to make our presentation to Brigadier Sultan Turki Bin Rabian and some of his officers. The ever present coffee bearing manservant hovered in the background.

We soon realised that the brief from Dr Zedan had been way off the mark. They didn't want a rapid reaction force; they needed a far more passive type of unit that could assist with internal policing. Our recommendations involving helicopter gunships and armoured personnel carriers didn't exactly bring the house down. In fact, they were looking at using horses. As the custodian of horses in Saudi, HRH Prince Faisal wanted to see a larger role being played by the equine war machine in the RSNG-WD.

After that it was back to the hotel and the drawing board. We decided to tell the brigadier that we preferred to return to South Africa and prepare a new proposal there now that we knew what they required. This was accepted and that evening we flew back to South Africa.

Chris immediately got to work preparing a modified proposal. A complete plan was also written for the proposed equestrian unit covering all aspects of horse selection as well as the training of the horses and the men who would be enrolled in the unit.

We again met Dr Zedan. Chris had pointed out that I would be expected to present Zedan with a monetary gift in appreciation for him having rescheduled our meetings and given us some useful cultural tips. I complied despite my reservations about such a donation potentially being viewed as a form of bribery. Chris countered by saying Dr Zedan had spent his own money opening the doors and arranging our trip.

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In the interim between the Saudi visits, Mark Stucke, the film maker we had last seen at the IDEX exhibition, contacted me with an urgent request that I loan him some money so that he could complete the 'EO documentary' he was working on.

Stucke's arrogance and self-importance were beyond belief—he underlined his plea with an undertaking to repay me as soon as funds were released, which he said would be within a matter of days, and took pains to assure me that I would be happy with his final production which 'would show EO in a favourable light'. By that stage, I knew better. Stucke's agenda had been secretly given to me—he was a devious liar as well as being a suspected MI agent.

I refused to loan him money as he had already shown that he could not be trusted. I also didn't want him to claim that I had 'bribed him' with a loan. Besides, I had no intention of paying a television producer or any other media person, regardless of how they intended to portray EO or myself. He begged and pleaded for several days before finally getting the message that I wasn't going to give him any money.

I did, however, arrange for him to be provided—free of charge—with video footage shot by Kallie Coetzee.

Stucke wasn't happy about my refusal to finance him and his documentary. Meanwhile, he had been very busy elsewhere.

We intercepted a fax he had sent to Andrew Fowler of ABC News on 16 April 1997. Apart from asking for funding, he stated:

More and more evidence mounting that EO may have been started by Tony Buckingham on behalf of UK intelligence agencies to help boost British interests in Africa. How's that? One highly placed military source prepared to speak so far. Otherwise only circumstantial evidence.

I found his attempt—after I had refused to 'loan' him money—to get money from ABC TV amusing. It was patently evident that he was lying: He clearly hadn't gone to the trouble of visiting the Registrar of Companies in Pretoria to view Executive Outcomes' founding documents. Even easier, he could have asked me to show them to him. I was pleased to note that he mentioned a 'highly placed military source'; it was an obvious reference to his Military Intelligence friends and his close cooperation with them.

Another fax was sent to Keith Bowers of the BBC on 19 April. In this he spelt out his actual mission:

I'm keeping you informed ... and German ZDF producer Hubert Seipel. I've also, you might recall, been pitching to Mr Lloyd of CH4... much shooting takes place here. We'll be going on to Angola where it all started, and perhaps also to Uganda where I believe we can for the first time prove EO have a significant secret contract.

Nobody has touched on the real story of Executive Outcomes. Our focus is the creation of a ruthless private army as the sword in Britain's financial empire, a sword to be wielded freely and with little regard for human rights, international opinion or law, and with one objective only, to make money at any cost. It's a tough nut to crack and is costing a small fortune. We're working with co- production money of £48 000 from ABC, ZDF, SVT, OTV. This is going to run out shortly and I'm keen to keep things rolling for another four weeks at least. Thus far the world has seen pretty much what Executive Outcomes wanted them to see. We will get past the cuddly mercenary image to confront the reality ... And we'll be tracing the secretive links from the headquarters in Kings Road to a corrupt network of third world businesses which cultivate corrupt leaders in order to secure business contracts. We understand they've recently tied up a deal with the Mois of Kenya and we have strong evidence to back it up... the material we've shot thus far. Hoping you still have some interest in the project and might at this late stage consider coming aboard. Even development money would be very useful.

Stucke was obviously lying for a living. His entire message to Bowers of the BBC was a lie—and he knew it. However, he needed more money to fund his nefarious campaign and lifestyle—even to the extent of asking me for money so that he could slander and smear Executive Outcomes. It seems he was truly a man with no shame and less integrity.

Mark Stucke, the UK-based film maker who tried to touch EO for money. He then lied to TV producers in the hopes of getting more money (photo: unknown)

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On 29 April, after collecting our new visas, Chris and I flew back to Jeddah to present our revised proposals to Brigadier Sultan Turki Bin Rabian and his officers. It took the better part of two days and much discussion before they pronounced themselves satisfied with what we had put before them, and they asked a lot of questions about how we would be able to assist them in coping with the problems in Mecca. They also wanted advice on how to set up an intelligence organisation.

From there we were again taken to the offices of Prince Faisal who questioned us about our proposals in detail.

At the end of our discussions it was decided that a small team of RSNG-WD officers would visit South Africa to continue the discussions and finalise our proposed role in Saudi Arabia.

Captain Hamoud Al-Terifi and his team arrived a few weeks later and we accommodated them in my house-cum-office in Danny Street.

During the day Chris took them to our Raslow offices[401] where discussions continued. Chris complained to me that they seemed more interested in wine and women than in achieving any real cooperation.

It was at this time that my decision to walk away from Executive Outcomes crystallised. Tired of having to defend legitimate contracts and the continued assaults by the DFA, MI and the media—as well as attempts on my life—I was mentally at the end of my tether. The toll of frequent long-distance flying had added a dimension of physical exhaustion. I needed to be elsewhere and clear my mind.

I resigned from Executive Outcomes shortly thereafter.[402]

On 25 October 1997, Chris Grové called and asked if I would accompany him and Nic to Saudi Arabia to finalise the RSNG contract. We flew to Jeddah a few days later. By then I was no longer the chairman or even a director of EO. Lafras had taken over the chair and Nic van den Bergh had been appointed CEO. Nic and Chris wanted me present during meetings to ensure a smooth transition to the new management team that had taken control of EO.

We had fruitful discussions, but apart from being invited to dine with HRH Prince Faisal, nothing ever came of this visit or the proposal we had submitted.

Nevertheless, the Saudi Charge d'Affaires in Pretoria, Dr Zedan, continued to pursue a friendship with me long after I had left EO. He frequently asked me to visit him at the embassy in Hatfield and over the years this relationship developed to the point where I would be invited to embassy functions and he would visit me at my home. We also went horse riding together.

In February 2000, Zedan asked me to pay a 'confidential' visit to the embassy. I was intrigued because it was the first time he had asked for a confidential meeting. He got straight down to business.

"First, I want your assurance that everything that passes between us will be treated in the strictest of confidence—even after the mission."

"The mission, Excellency?" I asked, taken aback.

After spending some time buttering me up by telling me that I was held in high regard by powerful people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—including members of the Saudi Royal Family—he made his pitch.

"Prince Faisal has recommended that we approach you as he knows how dedicated you are in what you do."

"I am truly honoured that Prince Faisal remembers and speaks well of me. But please don't keep me in suspense. What is required of me?"

"We need you to move some money for us," he responded. "How much money?"

"Lots and lots of money, mostly aid money."

"I don't think that will be a problem..." I responded, wondering who the Saudi's were sending so much money to.

"You will need several aircraft," he interrupted.

"That sounds like a lot of money. Why doesn't the government use Saudi aircraft to move it? Surely you don't need someone like me to do it?"

"We can't. Certain elements within the Kingdom mustn't know about the move," he countered.

"Why can't you simply do a bank-to-bank transfer? That's a lot less complicated and there's no reason why anyone should find out about it."

"No, no. A large sum of money is bound to attract attention if we use a banking system."

I began to feel uncomfortable and suspected that something not completely above board was going on. I had received many strange requests while with EO but this came close to topping them all. Either I was being set up by an intelligence or law enforcement agency, or the money, if real—was intended for the furtherance of some form of covert or possibly even illegal activity.

"Is this legal, Excellency?" I asked him bluntly.

"Yes, of course it is. If it wasn't I wouldn't be involved in it and I wouldn't be talking to you about it," he replied.

"But why me?" I asked, still curious.

"You know how to plan and coordinate things. You know where to get the correct people and how to negotiate. We would be comfortable with you running the project." Zedan went on to tell me that large amounts of cash in US dollars had to be moved from Benin in West Africa to Jeddah and onward from there. Another hoard had to be retrieved from Chad. The money would be consolidated in Jeddah and then flown to a final destination that he was not yet at liberty to disclose.

Despite my reservations, I promised Zedan that I would look into the matter.

Back home, I sat down and considered Zedan's strange request. I was persona non grata with the intelligence services, so I couldn't approach any of them for advice. The South African Police Service were apparently still looking into the media generated crimes I was supposed to have committed during my time at EO. Besides, it didn't seem to involve South Africa in any way. I started considering the options until I had a semblance of a plan on how to accomplish the movement of a very large sum of money.

I called Zedan on 11 February and asked for a meeting. “Are you ready to go ahead?” he asked.

“Sort of, Excellency—but I need to confirm some details with you. I have written a very broad concept outline but until I have some more information I cannot finalise the plan.”

After the usual pleasantries at his office, I presented him with the following broad operational outline:

Operation Dovetail

Status: Pending approval for go-ahead at 16:00 on 11 February.

Mission: Transporting money from Benin to Jeddah via Cairo and transporting money from Chad to Jeddah via Cairo.

Execution:

Phase 1: Benin to Saudi. Total weight to be moved—16 tons.

Phase 2: Chad to Saudi. Total weight to be moved—confirmation required.

Considerations:

Although a government project, client wishes to maintain a hands-off stance. Sponsor will not bail us out if anything goes wrong. Considering sensitivity of funds, mission will be dangerous. Flight plans, fuel stops, etc. to be confirmed. Security classification of project is top-secret. Cover story to be developed. Threats to expect and plan for:

Hijacking of cargo en route to aircraft. Hijacking of aircraft once airborne. Bombs on aircraft. Disruption by agents. Compromise by intelligence agencies/police services. Refusal of permission to overfly certain countries. Refusal of landing rights in certain countries. Emergency procedures. Media exposure. Operational plan (broad outline):

Once final approval and financial implications confirmed, broad plan for Phase 1 as follows: Recruitment of personnel. Plan final execution. Contract aircraft plus crew on ‘wet lease’[403].

Confirm flight paths, fuel stops Benin Cairo and Cairo- Jeddah. Implement plan.

Security:

Two teams will be used. One from Benin to Cairo, the second from Cairo to Jeddah. Teams must not be aware of the other’s identities prior to and during operation. Both teams to be unaware of final destination. At change of team time in Cairo, teams not to meet and discuss cargo.

Finale:

At Jeddah a third team (aircraft crew plus protection team) will take cargo to final destination.

Zedan listened in silence, making notes and nodding his head in what appeared to be agreement. When I finished he asked for a copy of my notes but I told him I first needed to get his reaction; I would give him a final copy for approval later.

He asked several questions regarding aircraft types, the approximate flight times, where I would recruit the personnel, and what weapons they would be armed with.

I answered most of his questions and explained how the aircraft would be paid for, and how the teams would be recruited. He continued making the occasional note but I suspected that our meeting was being recorded, and that the note taking was purely for my benefit.

"Good. When can you implement the operation?" he asked.

"As soon as I am given an official request from the Kingdom I will set the wheels in motion. I'm sure you understand, I cannot just go ahead on this kind of operation without official confirmation. I also need to, once I have the information I require, develop a detailed plan and present it for approval."

''You have my word that everything is in order," Zedan said. "Just complete your planning and get going as soon as you can. I forgot to say it but I want you on the plane when it lands in Jeddah. That's very important. We will pay you once you land there."

My radar instantly switched on…

"No, things don't work like that," I said shaking my head. "I cannot arrange finance with a bank to lease aircraft, hire teams, purchase equipment and weapons, and tell them they have my word that I will repay the money. This kind of operation must be funded in advance. I cannot do it out of my own pocket. I need guarantees which only you can provide. I have no problem with being on the aircraft during the operation, but first things first. I need the letter of appointment and some form of financial guarantee—as well as an agreed deposit."

"But I will repay you once it has been done," he said looking crestfallen. "I'm sure you would Excellency, but I need these things in advance."

"I'll see what I can do," he responded, clearly unhappy at the way the briefing had turned out. His demeanour had gone from friendly to sulky.

"I'll get back to you by four o' clock this afternoon."

I left his office deep in thought, mostly wondering why he was insisting that I be on the aircraft when it landed in Jeddah. I had actually planned to be there long before the operation kicked off because I intended to coordinate the entire operation from Saudi Arabia, but Zedan didn't need to know that yet.

Zedan never reverted to me as promised and although we still saw one another occasionally, Operation Dovetail was never mentioned again.

Although I had left the cloak-and-dagger world, the shooting war, and assistance to governments behind me, I continued to maintain regular contact with some of my old agents. Many had become friends and we met occasionally to drink coffee and discuss the world situation with particular reference to Africa. We would reminisce about the 'old days' and how naive we had been to allow ourselves to be used in the way we were.

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Ishmael (nom de guerre), a successful Middle-Eastern businessman and I had been friends for several years. Although he was never an agent of mine, we often met and discussed the rise of Islam, the Crusades, Islamic factions, the Islamic view of the West, and other matters of common interest. Ishmael had belonged to the Ayatollah Khomeini's

Revolutionary Guard after the Shah of Iran was deposed, and he'd fought as an infantryman during the Iran-Iraq war. He was also well connected with the South African Muslim community.

In early October 2000 Ishmael phoned and asked me to meet him urgently in a Pretoria shopping mall.

"I have some important information and I'm not sure what to do with it," he told me later over coffee.

"Okay, try me," I said.

"Certain people are planning to attack a US Navy warship in the Persian Gulf. They have devised a method of targeting such a ship without being picked up by the ship's radar."

"But why tell me? Surely the best thing to do is tell the Yanks at the US Embassy." "How do you think they'll react if a good Muslim like me walks into their embassy, asks for their CIA representative, and tells him such a story? Do you really think

they'll believe me? Definitely not."

"Ishmael," I said, "they won't believe me either. I've been branded an arch criminal-cum-soldier-of-fortune by the media both here and elsewhere. They'll probably think I'm after some sort of contract to protect their ships in the Gulf. They'll probably just tell me to fuck off."

"My friend, this is no joking matter for me. I despise the Americans but I'm not a radical Islamic terrorist. I know that many innocent people are about to be killed. If I can play some small part in preventing that, I will."

"Okay, I'll help if I can. What sort of ship are they planning their action against?" "It's not just a sort of ship—it's the USS Cole which is scheduled to dock in Yemen soon. It might already be there. If you can help, we must do something fast. They plan to use a small suicide boat packed with explosives and ram it into the ship. I'm not sure when it's going to happen but I know it will be soon."

After we parted I called Dr Zedan at the Saudi Embassy from my carphone and said I needed to see him about a matter of critical importance. He agreed to see me immediately.

I raced to the embassy and was hastily ushered into his office. I repeated Ishmael's story and said that I was approaching him because he had often voiced pro-American sentiments. His children were at school in America and he had also studied there. He was the only person I could think of who might be able to help. I was sure that no one else would even listen to me—especially not the staff at the US embassy.

Zedan was taken aback at what I told him and asked if Ishmael would be prepared to meet him. I was sure Ishmael would have no objection to such a meeting as he was very concerned about the situation, but I felt that the information was urgent and needed to be confirmed or refuted.

Ishmael very reluctantly agreed to come to the Saudi embassy within the hour. I waited for him to arrive, and after effecting the introductions between him and Zedan, I left.

Ishmael phoned me afterwards and said he had been taken to the boardroom where he was certain he had been filmed. He was debriefed by Dr Zedan and a European male with

a definite American accent, whom he assumed was a CIA representative. He was left with an uncomfortable feeling that they were merely playing games and didn't believe him.

"They were more interested in who had given me the information than anything else," he said. "Of course, I would never reveal my source, but I at least expected them to listen and take some precautions, even if they doubted the veracity of the information."

We left things at that, knowing we had done what we could to send a warning to the Americans. Given our vastly differing circumstances—Ishmael, a Muslim with a radical past, and myself, someone viewed with deep distrust by intelligence and law-enforcement agencies—we could only wait and hope that nothing happened in the Gulf.

On 12 October 2000 while watching CNN's evening news I was shocked to see that the USS Cole had indeed been attacked by a small boat piloted by two suicide bombers while refuelling in Yemen. Packed with explosives, the boat had been rammed into the side of the ship, ripping a huge hole in its hull. Seventeen American sailors had been killed and 389 wounded. The attack happened exactly as Ishmael said it would. It was a shame that no one had listened.

The USS Cole was severely damaged by suicide bombers despite warnings that the attack was about to take place (photo: unknown)

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I maintained contact with Zedan, and in the winter of 2003, he called and asked for another 'confidential chat' away from the embassy.

'What now?' I thought. I had heard from several sources close to him that he was experiencing financial difficulties on a personal level, and I hoped he wasn't going to ask me for money.

We met at the House of Coffees in the Brooklyn shopping mall in Pretoria. He was his usual charming self and regaled me with gossip from the kingdom and the South African diplomatic community.

"How would you like to make some money?" he suddenly asked.

"I'm never averse to making money, just as long as it's legal," I said with a smile. He smiled back.

"I asked how you would like to make some money—I meant make it in the true sense—print it for yourself."

He shuffled a small cardboard box across the table.

"Take it home with you. In it, you will find something you can use. Don't worry, Thabo [President Mbeki] and Tito [Mboweni, governor of the SA Reserve Bank] have used it. It's quite okay for you to use it as long as it's done for both of us."

To say I was surprised would be an understatement. I was immediately on my guard because I had previous experience of his 'confidential' meetings.

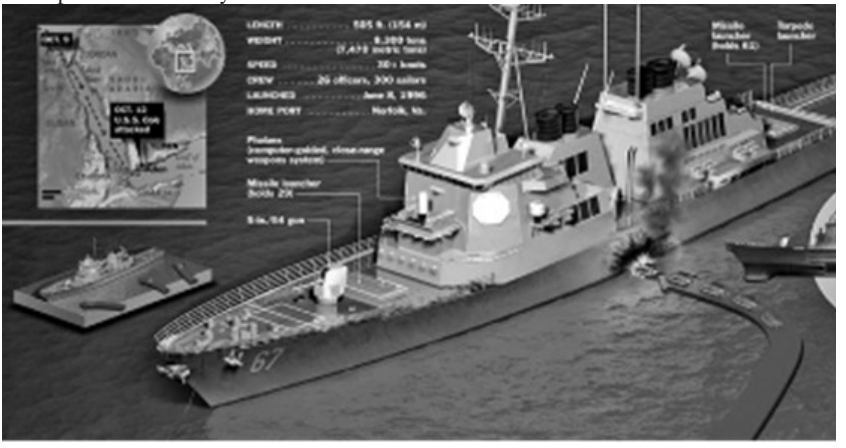
I waited until I got home and then opened the box carefully. I was shocked by its contents—inside were printing plates for US$ 100 bills. Judging by their condition they appeared to have seen use in the past. I realised that he had thrown in 'Thabo' and 'Tito' as a confidence trick to get me to work with him printing money.

I was extremely alarmed and wanted nothing to do with this scheme. I got into my car and sped back to the embassy. En route I called Zedan on the phone and said I was returning something to him.

He was visibly disappointed and said so. He told me that we could make a lot of money from those plates, but I assured him I wasn't in the market for making money in that manner.

After that our friendship withered and died. I saw him a few months later in a shopping mall and although we greeted each other, we didn't stop and talk.

I learnt in early 2005 that he had returned to Saudi Arabia after his diplomatic licence and diplomatic immunity had been revoked.



A graphic depicting the attack on the USS Cole. EO's warnings of an imminent attack on a US warship in the Gulf were ignored (image: Coffeypot on Blogger.com)

44:
Leaving What I Had Started

On 17 January 1997, Stephan Laufer of Business Day wrote a sensationalistic piece titled 'Mercenary group re-colonialising Africa'. His article made several false allegations against Executive Outcomes, all of them remarkably similar to 'Top Secret' MI-fabricated intelligence reports I had in my possession. I had to wonder if this was pure coincidence or if there was more to Laufer than he wanted known. I assumed the latter.

Dressing his lies as facts, Laufer stated that EO was working in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zaire, Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Morocco, and Algeria.

MI used Stephan Laufer, ex-KGB agent, to further their disinformation campaign against EO (photo: LinkedIn.com)

It was very obvious that he was lying on someone else's behalf but as it turned out, every journalist looking for fifteen minutes of fame took up his flag and started depicting Executive Outcomes as the military leg of a grouping of illuminati-esque neo-colonist enterprises, so much so, that some African governments now even suspected us of having sinister motives.

His claims about the several countries we had never operated in were also used as a reference point by other journalists. As a result, there was a massive explosion of new misinformation that galloped into previously uncharted territory by itself. The smear campaign had reached a tipping point; It no longer needed to be driven… it had taken on an independent momentum of its own.

Incidentally, Laufer[404] was a South African-born German citizen. He had been arrested by the German authorities in 1991 for having been a KGB agent from 1977 to 1990. He had apparently even admitted this to senior SA Police officers. I had to wonder, at the time, why MI and a reformed KGB (FSB) agent were secretly sharing disinformation.

In spite of already having been exposed as a KGB asset by Die Afrikaner of 12–18 July 1996, Laufer continued to ply his trade—this time as a journalist in the South African media. He had also been the late Joe Slovo's[405] communications advisor.

I found it deeply ironic that he had taken it upon himself to act as a moral custodian as far as EO was concerned, especially since he was lying through his teeth.

Laufer's disinformation piece in the Business Day was very different from the comments he had made during his speech on 24 May 1995, 'From the perspective of ministerial press secretaries' in which he claimed the following:

> Democracy is about accountability and participation at all levels. And participation and accountability are impossible without information...What does all of this mean for us as government's professional communicators?
>
> Equally, a well-informed media is one which is best able to reflect and evaluate the work being done...and least able to fall back into prejudice and irresponsibility.

Stephan Laufer clearly didn't practice what he preached, especially insofar as accountability or 'prejudice and irresponsibility' were concerned. As an ex-Soviet media agent, he was well versed in the maxim, the more often a lie is repeated, or the greater the lie, the more likely it is to be believed. His comment about a 'well- informed media' was indeed a joke.

He certainly seemed to get around. In 2007, he was the South African spokesman for Saab[406] and the German-based Thyssen Krupp Marine Systems, a company that became embroiled in the controversial SA Navy corvette programme. As the spokesman for a defence company that found itself accused of bribery and corruption, it is inconceivable that Laufer was unaware of what was happening behind closed doors. It was almost unbelievable that a man who began his adulthood as a committed communist and Soviet agent, ended up as the spokesman for Swedish and German arms manufacturers busy plundering a developing African country.

Being subjected to a massive non-stop disinformation and propaganda campaign against the company, travelling the world to secure contracts, giving presentations to foreign armies and governments, dodging the bullets and bombs of assassins hiding in the world I worked in, and trying to keep the company afloat had taken its toll. Surviving on coffee and cigarettes, and sleeping for only a few hours a night hadn't helped much either.

My options were to either stoop to the level of those opposing me and conduct similar actions against them—or leave.

Laufer's article was, partly, the straw that eventually broke the proverbial camel's back. I was tired of fighting a battle sponsored with taxpayers' money that I wasn't equipped to fight, against people who were motivated by values I was fundamentally opposed to. I was disgusted enough to begin seriously planning my exit from Executive Outcomes.

I had promised myself that, the day I left Executive Outcomes, I would give it to the men who worked so hard, and given their all for the company. That was to be my way of thanking them for what they had done.

I had already rewarded several of the men who had worked in Executive Outcomes, either by giving them shares in the company or by assisting them to start and run their own companies. Some of them would succeed. Those who were too lazy to work, didn't. Several of these enterprises were, however, regarded as 'front companies' for Executive Outcomes and attempts to ensure that they failed were quickly put into action.

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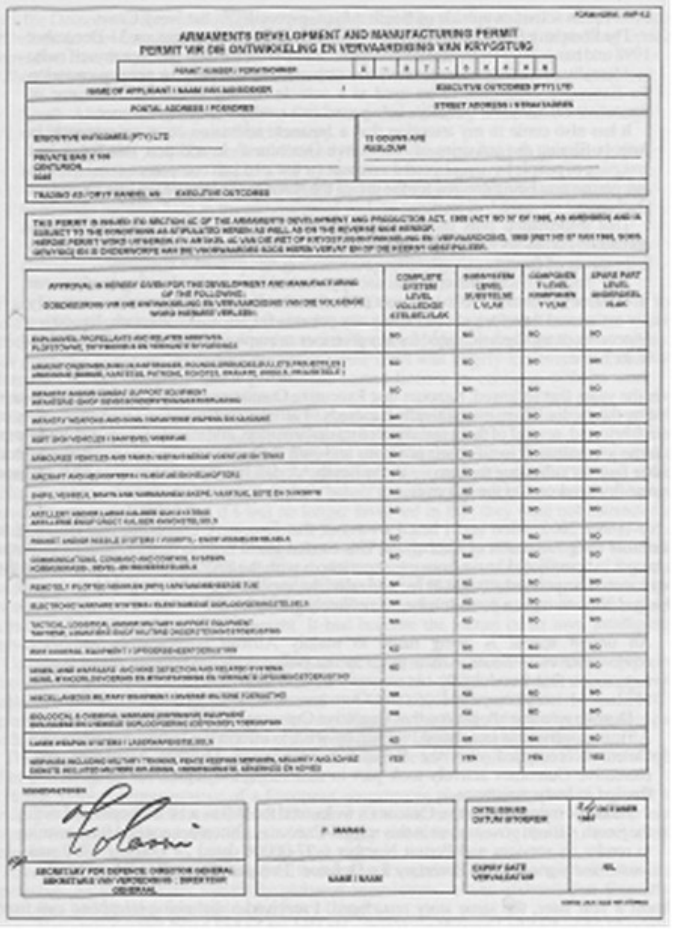
On 30 April 1997, a bill designated the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill [B54-97] was approved by the South African cabinet, pending submission and approval by Parliament during the 1997 parliamentary session. According to the media, this bill was specifically aimed at closing down Executive Outcomes and myself.

Unbeknownst to the media, we had been well aware that this bill was being planned and drafted. Indeed, we had welcomed it. The South African government had even asked us to provide input into several of its clauses, which we did.

As required by the new Bill, we applied for a government licence to continue our activities and this was duly granted. Despite showing several journalists our licence to operate, they continued to claim that we were operating illegally. Again, and as usual, I was told that it was not in the public interest to disclose this information as it might confuse readers. The South African media was clearly not about to change their narrative on EO. Nor would they allow facts to confuse their agenda.



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PERMIT VIR DIE ONTWIKKELING EN VERVAARDIGING VAN KRYGSTUIG

EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES (PTY) LTD

Executive Outcomes' business permit, issued by the South African government. The media refused to acknowledge that it had been granted

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On 14 June 1997, the African Research and Information Bureau (ARIB) hosted its 'Conference on Mercenaries and Instability in Africa'. Millius Palayiwa[407] from

International Alert[408] presented a paper titled 'Mercenaries, Big Business, and Arms Proliferation'. Although he had never spoken to me or anyone from the company, Palayiwa was able to present a 'comprehensive view' on Executive Outcomes. His paper included the following:

An example of such a mercenary group that has exploited this privatisation of security to the fullest business benefit is Executive Outcomes of South Africa. Who are they? Most of you here have heard of them. I want to give you a brief background as to who they are. They are a Pretoria registered and based company. They are registered as a security company. This has major implications for South Africa...They have been described as an assortment of assassins, spies, saboteurs, and scoundrels... They include persons from different countries and are veterans of combat around the world. Their motto or logo is 'Have Gun, Will Travel'.

Palayiwa did not stop pontificating there:

...Barlow ran death squads against so-called political foes of South Africa.
Most of their recruitment is done in the Republic of South Africa, the UK, Belgium, Portugal, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. In the UK, they have tended to go for recruits with combat experience in Northern Ireland, the Falklands, and Gulf wars. At present most of EO mercenaries are South African citizens, Portuguese, and French.

The rest of Palayiwa's paper was similarly based on fiction, lies, disinformation, speculations, and assumptions. People of his ilk had found their own niche market: the business of misrepresentation, perception manipulation, and duplicity on the international stage. I knew that if I tried to sue Palayiwa and his fellow fabricators, I would be bogged-down in the legal system and get nowhere. I just gave them enough rope to hang themselves.
I was sick and tired of the national and international hypocrisy that was so evident when it came to Africa and a few countries beyond it. Defeating the rebels, criminals, or terrorists in those countries was apparently considered to be bad form. As long as these forces of evil continued to operate, the UN had a reason for being in Africa, as did several NGOs. Similarly, certain governments, companies, and corporations were able to gain control over certain resources and then use those resources to fund anti-government forces.

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Just before I was about to take my leave from the company, an invitation arrived for Lafras, Nic, and myself to attend a closed-door conference in Washington DC hosted by the US Pentagon and the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). The conference was scheduled for 24 July 1997 and the US Embassy was quick to issue our visas.

At the same time, I was also invited to address an apparent 'peace building' conference in Norway. Fortunately, I was warned that this invitation was aimed at 'ambushing' me in an attempt to discredit everything EO and I had achieved. Information was also passed to me that the Norwegians were planning to attack my views on uncontrolled immigration of so-called internally displaced persons (IDPs), which was that IDPs were the result of conflict and poor governance and that a lack of control could lead to problems simply being transferred elsewhere.[409] The Norwegian embassy issued me with a visa, but I never made use of it.

Shortly before I arrived in Washington, the CBS television network aired a '60 Minutes' programme on Executive Outcomes. The programme, presented by Christiane Amanpour, was fairly objective, unlike many other documentaries on the company. She had interviewed many Sierra Leonean citizens who had expressed their gratitude towards EO. The majority stated that they had not wanted us to leave their country as we had been the only ones to bring stability and peace. They had also been concerned about the UN's poor 'peacekeeping' record and how that would impact on them.

Christiane Amanpour interviewed the author for the CBS programme, '60 Minutes' (photo: CNN Press Room)

One result of this programme was that many Americans—civilians and military alike—recognised me in the streets of Washington and asked if I was in America to assist their army. That would have been a turn-up for the books…

The conference, titled 'The Privatisation of National Security Functions in Sub-Saharan Africa', was initially to be held within the confines of the Pentagon but the venue was later changed and the conference was held in a Washington hotel.

Wayne Madsen, several years later, reported:

Present were none other than Spicer, Barlow, Grunberg, Sandline's U.S. representative Bernie McCabe (a former Green Beret), and retired DIA chief Gen. Ed Soyster of Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), now owned by L-3 Communications, and which, like Spicer's Aegis, has lucrative contracts in occupied Iraq. Also present were Charles Snyder, Executive Outcomes' Nick van den Bergh, and a representative of Texaco, CIA,

DIA, U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), Special Forces, and NSA personnel.

The conference, in my opinion, was the first to demonstrate genuine interest in companies such as Executive Outcomes. It showed how such companies could aid governments by supplementing their regular military forces and assist with force-projection. It also examined how to make 'private forces effective, efficient and loyal' and avoid 'unlicensed firms or rogue states' from creating havoc.

Apart from the people mentioned in Madsen's report, there were a host of other military officers, with Africa also represented by Uganda, Zambia, Guinea-Conakry, and Angola. Several of these officers approached Lafras, Nic, and myself in order to discuss problems with us and vent their frustration regarding the ineptitude of the UN and Western governments. Several of them also expressed their disquiet about the South African government's lack of concern towards the problems in Africa, its apparent support to anti-government forces, and its negativity towards EO.

It would later be reported:

The highly professional and disciplined manner in which EO carried out its objectives helped create a new climate of acceptance in some quarters. A symposium on the privatisation of security in sub-Saharan Africa, sponsored by the Pentagon's Defence Intelligence Agency last June in Washington, invited Mr Barlow and other top guns—like British Colonel Tim Spicer from Sandline International and retired DIA officer, Lt. General Edward Soyster, who represented the Virginia-based Military Professional Resources Inc.(MPRI).

US oil giants like Texaco and Exxon, the mining company Sierra Rutile, NGOs, the UNHCR, and UNICEF were also represented. Interestingly, in contrast to the OAU condemnations of mercenary activities during the 1960s and 70s, African states such as Angola, Guinea-Conakry, Uganda, and Zambia sent military attaches to the symposium.

None of the self-proclaimed experts on Executive Outcomes were invited to attend.

In a subsequent letter from the Defence Intelligence Agency, I was interested to note that they included several aspects of the issues I had raised—tailor-made solutions to problems, flexibility, knowledge and understanding of the problem, business integrity, expertise, confidentiality, and an apolitical stance—in their written summary of remarks.

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During a heated boardroom argument that erupted the day after our return from the US, I made my intention to leave the company very clear to everyone.

By then Nico Palm, Lafras Luitingh, Nic van den Bergh and I were no longer agreeing on many issues.

Driven to the point of exhaustion, we would bicker about even minor points that had little to no relevance to the world we were operating in, and with nerves sometimes

stretched to breaking point, we would belabour matters that had no advantage to the company or to our men.

"Do you think it's wise to leave? You started all of this…you shouldn't just pack your bags and go. You're the captain of the ship. Stick it out," said Lafras.

"No," I said, "This started as an attempt to recover our CCB pension money and really make a positive difference in Africa. It has now gone a lot further than that. Our position is that we really want to bring about an end to the trouble in Africa but no one outside the company believes us. What no one in the company seems to realise is that we need to take care of ourselves because no one else will. I'm sick and tired of the bickering and the bullshit. If the company wants to consult with me—at a price—they know where to find me."

On 27 July 1997, I submitted my resignation. My letter was short and to the point:

I hereby tender my resignation as director of the above-mentioned company with immediate effect.

Yours faithfully, LE Barlow

With that short letter, it was all over. Arrangements were made to remove me off all company registration documents.

I had achieved what I had set out to do: I had recouped my CCB pension, honoured my contract with the Angolan Armed Forces, and helped to end the war that was devastating that country. This contract had led to others. The company had brought about an end to the civil war in Sierra Leone and successfully conducted the hostage release in Irian Jaya. It had worked in Uganda, albeit on a small scale, paved the way for further work in Saudi Arabia, made presentations to the British Army's Rapid Reaction Forces, assisted the German Army with advice on tactical battlefield communications, and more.

But I was also tired.

I cleared my papers off the Raslow boardroom table and walked out, never to look back.

Executive Outcomes now belonged to the men I had left behind but I was concerned that within a short space of time, they would destroy it from within.

EO had built its reputation on accepting challenges that the UN—or anyone else for that matter—was not interested in resolving, but jealousy and greed are not conducive to good business practice, and EO began to flounder in this pond. There was in-fighting as members vied for positions within the company hierarchy, and some resorted to character assassination to improve their positions. Rumours also emerged that some of the senior personnel had used the company's name and reputation to secure contracts for themselves. These actions flew in the face of the aim I had initially imposed on the company: to provide a stable income to ex-soldiers, black or white, irrespective of their political inclinations, religious beliefs, or personal views, and to end conflicts in Africa. I firmly believed—and still do—that only Africans are capable of solving Africa's problems as foreign intervention had only created more problems.

I was indifferent to the rumours of in-fighting within the company's management. It now had nothing to do with me.

I continued to follow the media reports on EO whenever I could. Sadly, I noted that the reports were still laced with the same old spiced up disinformation.

I also continued to receive calls on my cell phone from governments who wanted to talk to me. I referred them to Executive Outcomes and told them I had left the company. Several refused to do so and insisted on talking to me. EO's executives also still called me, asking me to assist with proposals or negotiations for contracts, but I refused to get involved. Others asked me to start over, pledging their willingness to come over and join me. Although flattered by their loyalty, I had no interest in starting another company.

The intelligence services, predictably, believed that my resignation was just a smoke screen. I was still watched like a hawk. People became wary of associating with me because anyone seen in my company was considered to be an 'EO agent'. Once again, the intelligence services went into gear trying to discover something where there was nothing and once again wasted many thousands of Rands of taxpayers' money.

An undated list of Essential Elements of Information (EEI) concerning EO, compiled by none other than MI, came into my possession several months after I had left. It posed several questions, of which I found the following the most amusing:

There is still confusion (whether) Barlow resigned as director of EO... We need confirmation whether the meetings took place?

On 27/06/97 Barlow, at the invitation of NATO, was one of the keynote speakers at a recent Paris meeting where he spoke about the privatisation of peacekeeping. EO has also on several occasions been asked to advise NATO and the OAU.

It would seem as if Barlow's appearance as a guest speaker at seminars where NATO officials are also involved, may be interpreted as Barlow advising NATO. Is this a correct analysis?

Can the allegation that Barlow has had contact with MI5 and MI6 via the De Beers London office be substantiated?

The list was endless and accompanied by requests for more money for investigations into EO. I hadn't been anywhere near Paris to participate in the reported NATO discussion, but MI had incorrectly assumed I would never know about their lies and so would be unable to refute their assertions. The document also claimed that EO had signed contracts with the governments of Algeria, Morocco, Congo, Egypt, and South Korea. MI was living its lies to the hilt, tripping itself up on its own misinformation and using taxpayers' money to do it. Others felt that by producing 'intelligence' on a 'racist' and 'rogue' company such as EO, they would be showing their loyalty to the new ANC government and thus keep their jobs. They would later be proven wrong.

Even more to the dismay of the originator of the document were rumours that EO was going to get involved in fighting organised crime—something that was considered to be of grave concern to both DFA and MI. Perhaps they had their own reasons for wanting crime to escalate.

Although their disinformation and the way they squandered money and man- hours to investigate EO—and me in particular—irritated the hell out of me, I could do nothing

about it.

About a month after I had left EO, Andrew Malone, a British journalist trying to earn a living, wrote a misleading 'exclusive' article for the London-based Sunday Times of 27 July 1997. Amongst other things he stated:

> Executive Outcomes ... is facing a battle for its own survival following a series of disastrous expeditions abroad and an outbreak of hostilities with the South African government.
>
> The 2 000[410]-strong multinational army for hire ... soldiers of misfortune after they were chased off a remote island[411] by spear-throwing rebels and were then confronted with impending legislation to outlaw their activities.

Malone's article was certainly exclusive because it was pure fiction. Unfortunately, the reputable Sunday Times accepted his copy at face value.

The Institute for Security Studies continued to propagate disinformation on Executive Outcomes in their Occasional Paper 25, dated September 1997:

> Morally, there can be no doubt as to the repugnance of mercenary activity, or any form of private activity which makes a direct contribution to igniting or prolonging violent armed conflict. The decision to intervene and to take sides in an armed conflict is a political one, whether it is made by an international organisation, a regional organisation, a coalition of states, or a single state. When private individuals and companies are allowed to make such decisions, the concept of international law loses all meaning. Privatised soldiers and gun- runners operate in a secretive world. They recruit in an underworld, one shared by international drug cartels, terrorists, and dealers in endangered species.
>
> On 30 April 1997, the South African Cabinet approved the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill [B54–97] pending submission and approval by Parliament during the 1997 session. This legislation is co-sponsored by the ministers of Defence, Justice, and Foreign Affairs, with the chairperson of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Professor Kader Asmal, as the driving force behind the Bill. The legislation aims to prevent South African companies and citizens from rendering military or military-related services abroad without the Government's authority—particularly those services which may fall within the ambit of the new style of mercenary activity (such as the much publicised exploits of Executive Outcomes in Angola, Sierra Leone, and its proxy involvement in Papua New Guinea). This curbing of mercenary activities is sure to be welcomed by peace loving South Africans everywhere. However, serious questions arise from the Bill (in its present form) since it casts its net to include much wider activities unrelated to 'military' matters in the conventional sense. At the same time, the Bill subverts parliamentary oversight and accords Minister Asmal extensive discretionary powers more reminiscent of the apartheid era, than of Mandela's Government.

At that time, I wished I could lay my hands on the ISS' sponsor list as it would have allowed me to see whose bidding they were doing. Their stance on EO, in my opinion, exposed their anti-Africa and pro-conflict position.

I had a good laugh when I read the newspapers in April of 1998. MI had finally been caught with their pants down. I was aware, through my agents, that they had been hatching a plot to deceive President Mandela but I didn't think that they would actually be so stupid as to end up believing their own lies. They had been.

The Citizen ran the headline on 2 April 1998: 'No substance to coup report'. The Mail & Guardian's headline was 'Coup plot backfires on old guard'.

The stories ran after a coup-plot document compiled by MI had been handed to President Mandela. A commission, known as the Mohammed Commission, had investigated the alleged plot to overthrow the Mandela government and found that it was flawed and lacked substance. In short, it was pure fiction.

SANDF Chief General Georg Meiring, the man who had fired the first shots in the disinformation war against Executive Outcomes—was forced to fall on his sword and resign. His departure was, in my opinion, certainly no loss to the SANDF or to South Africa.

The South African Sunday Times of 14 June 1998 saw it this way:

> There was the report breathlessly handed to President Nelson Mandela earlier this year by then SANDF chief General Georg Meiring, which made good reading until you got to the part where Michael Jackson[412] was planning a coup.

This coup-plot document was compiled by a low-level MI officer. It had been brought to the attention of Meiring via counter-intelligence chief Brigadier Louis Coetzee and his immediate superior, Lieutenant General Dirk Verbeek, the Chief of Staff Intelligence. Both officers quietly left MI shortly thereafter. I was familiar with Coetzee and Verbeek's names as they had signed a Top Secret recruitment authorisation for Major John Tongala to gather intelligence on Executive Outcomes in 1996. The motivation for this recruitment had been written by Colonel AG Veldhuizen in his capacity as SSO CI Investigations. Veldhuizen, it seemed, had his own axe to grind.

Lieutenant General Dirk Verbeek handed over the fabricated intelligence report, regarding the coup plot that US pop star Michael Jackson was supposedly sponsoring, to General Meiring (photo: SANDF)

This was the same MI that had compiled countless false secret documents and reports on Executive Outcomes and myself, but sadly, no commission had ever been appointed to investigate those. Such a commission could have saved the state millions—and exposed MI as a purveyor of disinformation and lies.

Nevertheless, the chickens were coming home to roost.

The Sunday Times in its report asked the question: "Why is it that the dumbest documents in this country are all 'intelligence reports' produced by intelligence agents?"

I had been asking the same question for a long time.

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Nico Palm contacted me on 22 April 1998. Another death threat against me had arrived by fax. The illiterate writer-cum-hitman had sent a postcard (erroneously addressed to Executive Outcomes) to Branch Energy's offices in London. Posted in Ireland, it had been addressed to me, Tim Spicer, and Tony Buckingham. Branch Energy had faxed it to EO's office in Pretoria. This kind of threat was not new to me:

Well hellow you 3 jackasses. Tut-tut. Going in front of a camera like that. Our wars over. Fuckin politicians spoil all the fun. We're going to do the kaffirs a favour and slot the 3 of you as a freebee. See you soon.

PS: Bring your own Semtex and make the party go with a bang!

“What do you want me to do about this?” Nico asked.

“Nothing,” I replied. “It was obviously written by an illiterate dimwit. He probably wants us to tremble in fear and pay him off. The idiot can’t even spell and probably doesn’t even know where South Africa is.”

Just as I started thinking my contact with Executive Outcomes was finally over, I was prompted to call the company in September 1998 during the ill-advised and poorly planned South African military invasion of Lesotho, a small landlocked country totally surrounded by South African territory. I looked on in morbid fascination as the new SANDF attempted to flex its weak muscles, invading Lesotho on 22 September—and totally destroying the erstwhile image and reputation of the once mighty South African Defence Force.

In an operation code named Operation Boleas, the SANDF crossed the South African-Lesotho border with 600 men supported by Ratel IFVs (infantry fighting vehicles) and helicopters. Its aim: to suppress growing tension in the mountain kingdom and reverse a supposed coup.

Displaying a lack of basic common sense and an inability to understand the very nature of armed conflict, the SANDF had armed the Ratels with blank ammunition in the false belief that their very presence would scare the tiny Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) into surrendering. It didn’t.

The ill-fated SANDF invasion of Lesotho resulted in millions of Rands worth of damage to Maseru (photo: Alamy.com)

When the troops crossed the border, Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad declared, “There has been a coup and in terms of SADC policy, the SADC decided to assist the government to normalise the situation.”

To say the least, Pahad’s statement was disingenuous. There had not been a coup in the accepted sense: the opposition had not seized power or taken over key government positions. It had not made Lesotho ungovernable. But, the South African government wanted to flex its weakened muscles.

By nightfall the SANDF had been joined by approximately 200 troops from the Botswana Defence Force (BDF).

Incapable of containing the inexperienced and out-gunned LDF, the SANDF was forced to issue its troops with live ammunition and increase the troop level to more than 3 500 men supported by armoured cars. Working alongside troops from the BDF, it took this large force more than 48 hours to occupy two LDF bases, near the capital, Maseru, and the Katse Dam. I was flabbergasted.

The SANDF soon suffered its first casualties. A poor campaign strategy, a lack of intelligence, questionable leadership, and bad operational planning were apparently the order of the day. The media actually called this force 'dangerously under strength'. This, in my opinion, was a propaganda ploy to downplay the SANDF's incompetence. The SANDF clearly needed help if it was to restore its image.

"Nico, I know this has nothing to do with me anymore, but I would strongly suggest that Executive Outcomes offers to help the SANDF. They are not only destroying their image and reputation, but South African soldiers are being killed and wounded."

"We have already offered to assist them, but our offer was very quickly turned down. They said they didn't need any help…especially not from us," Nico responded.

Within a short space of time, the SANDF had lost nine men killed in action and numerous wounded.

The financial cost, for damaged and destroyed property and infrastructure alone was estimated at R1 billion (approx. US$200 million).

This limited SANDF excursion, according to the British media, had cost the South African taxpayer R3 million a day. The SANDF disputed this figure, claiming that it had cost only R8 million a week.

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Later that year, a statement by J F 'Jack' Jolis, President, Rough Diamond Consultancy of Antwerp, Belgium was brought to my attention. Giving testimony before the Subcommittee on Trade of the US Senate Ways and Means Committee on 13 September 2000, he discussed diamonds and African conflicts as follows:

I am an American diamond dealer/consultant and have worked for thirty years in every part of the globe where diamonds are mined, bought, sold, and cut. Having for the past year or so read and heard so much about how the relatively small diamond business is responsible for 'funding' the maniacal carnage we witness pretty much throughout Africa, I feel compelled to reply.

Let's take a look at Africa and its suddenly infamous diamond producing countries:

Sierra Leone: Even if not a single diamond existed there, not a man, woman or child would escape being amputated or beheaded by a rusty machete.

Let us not waste valuable time talking about 'peace-keeping' or 'mercenary' forces in Sierra. 'Peacekeepers'? They consist mostly of Nigerian gangsters, assisted by some Guinean gangsters, who are not only better armed, but even more intent on killing anyone who gets in the way of putting their hands on the diamonds. And in Sierra, there is a lovely bunch of drugged-up thugs called the Kamajors, who, while professing to support

the current government find themselves fighting their allies, enemies, even themselves— not for diamonds, but because they're drugged and all they know what to do is fight. You think they would know how to sell an uncut diamond?

Do diamonds pay for this mayhem? I doubt it, not when you are offered, as I was recently in Kinshasa, a fully-loaded AK-47 for $10. To top it all, the Leonean government hires a bunch of quaintly named South African mercenaries called 'Executive Outcomes' who are not only paid by the government with diamonds, but are even given diamond fields to exploit. And this by a government, supported by the UN, that is bleating about their 'rebellion' being financed by diamonds. Angola: Sure, for the time being most of the diamond fields lie in UNITA hands, but these areas change hands according to the fortunes of war. In any case, the MPLA also have diamond fields of their own and I happen to know at first hand of many of the MPLA's 'generals' who sell their diamonds to UNITA. The MPLA have infinitely more money from oil to buy weapons than UNITA has diamonds. Not to mention the fact that the UNITA diamonds which are mostly on the western bank of the Cuango River are in no way distinguishable from the same diamonds found on the Congo side of the river. So?

There is a lot of uninformed talk of some sort of 'invisible infrared internal marking' scheme for polished stones, which, even were it possible, which it isn't, would immediately wipe out the entire category of 'D-Flawless' polished stones. And then there is a theory about 'branding' rough diamonds. Eh? First of all, branding a rough diamond makes about as much sense as branding a cow and then determining where the resulting steak came from. And, as for the notion of branding a cut diamond along its border (with, say, something like 'De Beers 2001 X') , any half-clever diamond cutter could do the same, using the same number he might have come across on a similar sized De Beers stone.

So there is a lot of uninformed chatter about 'identifying the provenance of diamonds', whether cut or un-cut. No can do. Certainly not in any court of law— any 'expert' will be countered by an opposing 'expert'.

Which brings me back to what is currently known as the DR [Democratic Republic] Congo, a country with at least three different areas producing distinctly different diamonds. Some 'rebel'. Some 'government'. Mix them together into a single parcel, and the job of determining which are the 'clean' stones becomes even more impossible. Angola stones? Take some from UNITA-held zones, mix them with stones from the MPLA, add some stones from Ivory Coast and some others from Guinea and the Central African Republic, and you've got what? A big load of nothing that is not remotely identifiable by anyone reputable.

If diamonds were the proximate cause of African tribal butchery, how can one explain the Congolese civil war of 1960? Pro-Western Moise Tshombe tried to establish independence for his copper-rich (and diamond-rich) province today known as Kolwezi. He was foiled by the UN-sponsored [Joseph] Kasavubu, who in turn was overthrown by the equally UN-sponsored Mobutu, whose people killed the communist [Patrice] Lumumba but the point of all this ancient history is that at the time nobody even uttered the word 'diamond'—it was all copper! And do you remember the civil war in Nigeria,

between the breakaway Biafra and the then 'Federal' government? What did diamonds have to do with that butchery? Right. Exactly nothing.

Or the five civil wars in the Tchad [Chad]? Over diamonds. Sorry. Nary a one. Or, even the 40 years plus civil war in the Sudan. Over diamonds? The only diamond you might find in the Sudan would be lodged between the Mahdi's cadaver's two front teeth.

And the unspeakable mangle-shambles that used to be Somalia. Any diamonds involved in that particular charnel house? I don't think so.

And finally, in the worst killing fields since Cambodia, is the incredibly barbaric Hutu-Tutsi mutual genocide in any way financed by diamonds? Of the 'blood' kind or any other? No.

That Africa is in a dreadful and perhaps even terminal mess is undeniable. But to fob off this horrible internecine catastrophe on the fact that diamonds along with a heck of a lot of other stuff—abound there is to utterly lose any claim to a perspective on the problem. As I said earlier, you could take away every diamond that exists under the soil there and not a single human being who is currently being killed tortured or maimed would be spared.

An interesting case in point is the Central African Republic, where the two major tribes, the Bayas and the Bandas, have been at each other's' throats since time immemorial. And yet diamonds are found in profusion in both these tribes' areas. They are manifestly not killing each other for diamonds.

There are really only two possible solutions to the problem.

First, and this is not really much of a solution at all, is to let them chop each other up until 'the last man is standing'.

Second would be to send in the only men who are competent and incorruptible enough to do the job properly: The British SAS and their Parachute Regiment; The French Foreign Legion and their Regiment Etranger Parachutes; and the US Special Forces and our Delta Force. Neo-colonialism? You betcha. And 99% of the people of embattled Africa would kiss your feet for it.

But ban 'blood' or any other-diamonds? First of all, such a plan would not succeed. Diamonds, like fine art, are non-fungible, and by definition, are not 'controllable'. And, even in the unlikely event that such an anti-diamond scheme did have a measure of success, the only people it would hurt would be the already dirt-poor hard-working artisan/digger poor devils, digging away in the Third World certainly not diamond dealers who have stocks like Unca Scrooge had a swimming pool overflowing with golden spondulics.

Mr Jolis' statement surprised me.

As someone who claimed to have spent '30 years in every part of the globe where diamonds are mined, bought, sold, and cut' he was certainly not very well informed. Ironically, I cannot find any similar statement from Mr Jolis at the time that the diamond fields in Africa were under the control of either UNITA or RUF—or any other rebel group for that matter. Perhaps Mr Jolis was merely voicing his frustration at having to buy Angolan and Sierra Leonean diamonds legally from someone other than the rebels.

45:
The Disinformation War

Only several years after I left the company did I realise the full extent of the disinformation campaign generated by the intelligence services, the DFA, Sean Cleary, and their useful idiots, against both Executive Outcomes and myself.

Much of this so-called intelligence was fed to the NICOC (National Intelligence Coordinating Committee). The NICOC's objectives were—and still include— providing strategic intelligence guidance to the state in support of South Africa's National Strategy, evaluating the intelligence that is provided by the intelligence services, formulating specific actions aimed at neutralising any threats, and exploiting any advantageous intelligence.

The NICOC itself does not have an intelligence-gathering capability. It relies on intelligence fed to it by various intelligence services, government departments, and occasionally, private enterprises. The DFA, MI, NI, Strategic Concepts, and the SAPS swamped the NICOC with so much disinformation that it was obliged to consider some form of action against Executive Outcomes.

These parties based a lot of the disinformation they disseminated on a highly classified British Intelligence disinformation document on EO called 'UK Alpha Eyes Only', much of it passed to MI6 (who had ostensibly compiled it) through DFA and MI liaison channels.[413] Further false allegations were added by people such as Colonel Jan Breytenbach, Jakkie Cilliers of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), and even select members of the UN who (according to Sean Cleary's confidential letters to Anglo American) could be 'persuaded' to word documents in a certain manner.

Their methodology was simple: the services would generate an item of disinformation and pass it on to an agent in the media who would, in turn, add his or her own spin and create a feeding frenzy among journalists looking for sensationalistic stories. Once published in its various forms, the morphed lie would be recycled back into the services who would once again elaborate on it or generate 'proof' to back it up. By fabricating their own fictions, the services and the media occasionally forgot exactly what they had written, about whom, and when, and often contradicted their earlier reports.

The security services were able to write whatever they wanted, cloak it by classifying it 'secret' as though it were vital to South Africa's national security, and then leak it to the media for public consumption. A large section of a very ignorant and gullible public swallowed these lies.

MI concocted a 'classified' document, intended for use as 'background information' in their slanderous stories and aimed at creating specific perceptions that could be further exploited (by themselves or the media) to influence government. Titled 'Executive Outcomes, an overview', it was purported to be a comprehensive analysis of Executive Outcomes and it was fed to several journalists covertly employed by MI.

This document, in part, stated:

Executive Outcomes was registered in 1993 in Great Britain by Tony Buckingham. Sixty EO men formed a police 'rapid response' unit known as Saracen.

In Sierra Leone EO was paid with diamonds and given diamond mining concessions.

... according to Eeben Barlow... Heritage Oil and Gas and Executive Outcomes were one and the same.

Ibis Air was originally Capricorn Air, the first airline to transport Executive Outcomes personnel to Angola... and coincidentally believed to be the descendant of the Capricorn Africa Society established by the mercenary founder of the SAS, Sir David Stirling (now deceased).

EO consisted of 'white people from the south, re-conquering the African continent with planes, money, banks, and mines'.

David Arap Moi, the son of President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, was a partner in EO.[414] In Uganda, General Kaleb Akandwanaho aka Salim Saleh owned 45% of the Executive Outcomes front company known as 'Saracen Uganda' which was 'rumoured to have supplied weapons to the Patriotic Front of Rwanda (PFR) and to the rebels in Sudan, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army.[415]

Military contracts ... exist with Sri Lanka, Turkey, Malaysia, Algeria, Nigeria, Ghana, Burundi, and Papua New Guinea.

The ANC, prior to the 1994 elections, entered into an agreement with Executive Outcomes: In return for keeping 'troublemakers out of South Africa, the government would turn a blind eye to the activities of the company'.[416]

It was truly astonishing that not a single journalist attempted to verify when, where, or by whom, EO had been formed (a quick search at the Registrar of Companies would have yielded that information). Instead, they willingly chose to forego any research and published whatever came their way, in essence, propagating an agenda aimed at fuelling conflict and crime, and vilifying the company. MI was quick to capitalise on their ignorance, their laziness, and their desire for sensationalistic scoops.

MI's Sub-Division Counter Intelligence worked equally hard at devising new disinformation, apparently on an almost daily basis. It was SDCI that provided much of the information to the Steyn Commission.[417]

General Pierre Steyn had been relying heavily on this 'intelligence' when ultimately, he had recommended that the DCC[418] be closed down and numerous officers retrenched. Given SDCI's methodology, I very much doubted the veracity of the 'intelligence' they provided; in effect, their fabrications were directly responsible for South Africa's loss of a covert military intelligence-gathering capability within the armed forces. Not only had they cast the bullet, they had fired it through their own foot.

An ex-MI officer later told me:

"You need to remember…at that time, it was obvious that South Africa was heading for a change in government. We needed to prove to the government in waiting that we were not afraid to go after our own. We were actually desperate to keep our jobs once the change had occurred, so creating false intelligence was not a problem. Besides, EO and yourself were already a thorn in the side of the National Party and big business. Making up stories to shaft you was no big deal; we could live with it and still look good, and we continued to do it when the ANC came to power."

The coordinator of the Executive Outcomes project appears to have been a Lieutenant Colonel Maryna Fondse of SDCI. Captain JF Booysen and Lieutenant Colonel PJ van der Merwe provided her with much of her so-called intelligence. She was very quick to verify their lies and ensure they reached the 'right people' in order to make herself look clever and knowledgeable about EO. She and her associates lied for a living. Hidden under various classifications (from 'Restricted' to 'Secret') disinformation was fed to the NICOC via 'Agent Reports' and special intelligence reports. Unbeknown to MI, my own agents (who were safely ensconced within that organisation) passed dozens of copies of these documents to me.

I tried, on numerous occasions, to get journalists and other 'EO experts' to at least investigate the various reports but to no avail. Apparently the lies were more fascinating than the truth. Besides, at that time, money could buy whatever 'truth' was required.

I found it deeply ironic that MI, an organisation that advocated objective information collection and the verification of such information through an intelligence cycle, were so quick to discard their own doctrine in favour of lies.

Written in poor English and Afrikaans by semi-literate agent handlers and analysts, the contents would have been laughable had they not been so damaging to us.

Here follows a small selection of extracts from some of the intelligence reports I received:

Report Number: CH/040/95 Subject: EO contracts
Date compiled by Handler: 24-03-95
EO has confirmed contracts in the following countries: Madagascar, Malawi, Algeria, Sierra Leone ... Malawi ... is a combat contract. EO is still busy finalising contracts with seven countries.

I had no idea where their agent handler got this 'intelligence' from. We had a small presence in Sierra Leone at that time but I had never been approached by any of the other countries mentioned in the report. Shortly after it was passed to me, several journalists questioned me about EO's 'combat operations' in Malawi. As this 'intelligence' had originated with MI, it was not difficult to guess who had briefed the media.

Report Number: CH/038/95 Subject: Theft of SANDF equipment Date compiled by Handler: 24-03-95

1. EO has in its possession the following equipment that was stolen from the SANDF; 1 x MKV7 Drivers goggle as well as 1 x LKV double lens on tripod (stolen from 5 RR)
2. Specialist diving equipment (4-man team equipment) valued at approximately

R20 000

3. Special parachutes stolen by Deon ... at Walmansthall from the special store
4. The ration packs used are SANDF equipment
5. The water bottles used are SANDF equipment
6. The special rucksacks used are SANDF equipment.

Blatantly accusing a company of having stolen government property is an extremely serious charge. Hiding that allegation under a security classification is the height of cowardice. No journalist had the courage to approach us about these allegations so we were never able to refute them; we just had to sit and fume. This report entrenched the perception that EO was acting as a criminal cartel and targeting SADF stores.

Report Number: CH/030/95 Subject: Pik Botha
Date compiled by Handler: 24-03-95

1. Pik Botha is involved with EO but not directly.
2. Botha gave money to Lafras (Luitingh) to start EO.
3. Botha was recruited as a CIA agent during his time at the UN. The CIA gave the money to Botha to give to Lafras.

This report was one of the most surprising of all. Pik Botha, then Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs, was certainly no friend of the MPLA's—as he will himself testify. Nor was he a friend of EO's or of mine. To claim that he had provided the money to start Executive Outcomes—and that the CIA had financed it—was ludicrous beyond belief. SDCI also overlooked the fact that EO had started long before I met Lafras Luitingh. This report was merely another attempt to imply that we were part of a dastardly FIS plot to destabilise Africa and needed to be stopped. The true planners of destabilising actions were safely hidden behind the DFA and MI's lies.

A UK-based EO company did indeed exist. The SA Reserve Bank and the Receiver of Revenue had advised us to open this company to enable us to bank in South Africa using foreign currency. In addition, this company's bank records were subject to frequent scrutiny by the Reserve Bank, the SA Receiver of Revenue, and the UK's revenue authorities.

Report Number: CH/053/95 Subject: Provocateurs/Nigeria
Date compiled by Handler: 6-04-95

Hans ... and Willie ... were sent to Nigeria to act as provocateurs. EO has a group of members that are used as provocateurs in countries where they wish to establish contracts.

The provocateurs make a study of strong and weak points of a country like Nigeria. When they have established the weak points, these are exploited to cause unrest in the country. When this happens 'brokers' arrive and offer EO's services to certain large companies to protect their property against payment.

Once EO has commenced protecting companies, they offer their services to the government to bring about peace.

According to ... this was a general tactic amongst Special Forces members during the bush war in Namibia. As soon as the war was 'going a bit slow' they would attack RSA bases in order to escalate the war.

Reports accusing us of having acted as 'provocateurs' in African countries were disingenuous but they were guaranteed to get NICOC members sitting up straight in their chairs. It was no small wonder that the newly installed ANC government grew concerned about the company and started cautioning other African governments to be wary of giving us contracts. It seemed the intelligence community was happy to misadvise government and idly watch African states destroying themselves through conflict and war while South Africa sold them the weapons and training to do it—as happened with Rwanda and Burundi. To further allege that SA Special Forces had attacked SADF troops bordered on the insane. This merely confirmed my belief that so-called intelligence officers had no clue what they were talking about—and very little common sense—when it came to war and warfare.

Report Number: CH/065/95 Subject: EO buying out Mechem Date compiled by Handler: 10-04-95

1. Mechem is currently in Mozambique busy with a mine-lifting contract under the guidance of Rocky...
2. Eben [sic] Barlow (currently abroad and returning on the 15-04-95) is busy buying-out Mechem.
3. The two members that are currently recruiting for the project are Sakkie ... and John ...

Initially known as the Applied Chemistry Unit, a division of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Mechem was a company that specialised in researching and developing mine warfare equipment and special demolition techniques. Led by the brilliant Dr Vernon Joynt, they were also world leaders in shaped charges and de-mining operations. The thought that we would, or even could, buy so large a company was absurd. The report, however, was deemed so valuable that agents were tasked to monitor the transaction and report our intentions.

Report Number: CH/075/95 Subject: EO

Date compiled by Handler: 14-05-95

EO has acquired two UN helicopters ... The helicopters were brought to Lanseria via ... The two pilots ... the helicopters were stolen in Somalia.

This report further compounded allegations that EO was stealing equipment— not only from the SANDF but also from the UN. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to steal a UN helicopter, but according to SDCI we stole two of them and flew them, over several hostile areas, from Somalia to South Africa—in full view of airport watchers. They never explained how we were supposed to have refuelled these helicopters on route to SA. This allegation resulted in demands that the SAPS investigate EO 'to the bone'. I was questioned by an SAPS investigation team and asked to provide proof that EO had indeed purchased the helicopters. They uncovered the shocking truth: EO had bought the helicopters in Mozambique and not Somalia. The SAPS wasted precious time and money that could have been used to combat real crime, only to find that the allegation was false.

Report Number: SF/0037/95 Subject: weapons sales, ex-SANDF Date compiled by Handler: 01-08-95

The following two persons are trading in SANDF weapons: Calvin Pendle, resident at ... tel (011) 760 ... and Col Peter Lemon of Pretoria. Pendle acts as a middle-man for Lemon. According to Pendle, Col Lemon (ex-engineer) still has his connections with the SANDF and can acquire any type of weapon without any unnecessary questions being asked.

Pendel [sic] says that Lemon is not in the RSA. Lemmon [sic] is currently advising Eben Barlow in Angola/Mozambique with an unknown project.

Pendel further states that Lemon has in the past advised Eben Barlow in an advisory role as well as in a logistics capacity in Mozambique.

I was astonished when I read this report. I had never met this Pendel nor had I ever heard of an ex-sapper colonel with the surname Lemon. I could only wonder what mischief SDCI were up to. Lemon had certainly never advised me on anything and we had not yet visited Mozambique at that time.

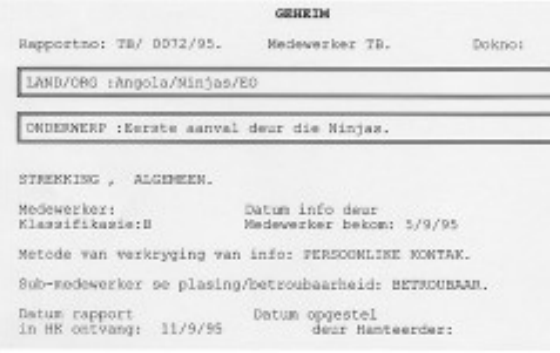
Following on the heels of a report alleging that EO had established a super-secret combat unit in Angola known as the Ninjas, the next report sought to exploit the initial disinformation.

Report Number: TB/0072/95 Subject: Angola/Ninjas/EO

Date compiled by Handler: 5-9-95

The Ninjas launched their first attack (murder) on 2/8/95 on the town Luho at 05:45 as a first light attack. According to the source South African members did the planning. Weapons used in the attack included: 60mm mortars, RPG-7 rocket launchers, PKMs, AK-47s, and 40mm grenade launchers.

The attack lasted 40 minutes. The Ninjas suffered no casualties and the town was totally destroyed.



GEHEIM

Rapportno: TB/ 0072/95. Medewerker TB. Dokno:

LAND/ORG :Angola/Ninjas/EO

ONDERWERP :Eerste aanval deur die Ninjas.

STREEKSING , ALGEMEEN.

Medewerker: Datum info deur
Klassifikasie:S Medewerker bekom: 5/9/95

Metode van verkryging van info: PERSOONLIKE KONTAK.

Sub-medewerker se plasing/betroubaarheid: BETROUBAAR.

Datum rapport in HK ontvang: 11/9/95 Datum opgestel deur Hanteerder:

The concocted report about EO and the 'Ninjas'. The report was titled, 'Angola/Ninjas/EO. The author was given many such intelligence reports by his agents

I could only shake my head in utter disbelief. EO had now been accused of planning and aiding the murders of civilians in a village in Angola. Had such an event occurred, the Angolan government would most certainly have stepped in and punished any EO member taking part in such an action. Incidentally, the FAA did not use 40mm grenade launchers, so again, MI's lack of information on weapons and weapons systems in use by FAA was very evident.

An MI officer later told me, "There was hardly a morning that EO didn't feature as a topic on the agenda of our morning conferences. We were instructed to make every effort to stop you."

He went on to tell me that attempts had even been made to falsify documents indicating that EO was planning a coup d'état somewhere in Africa. These were to be written on EO letterheads (to add credibility to the deception) and then leaked to the media.

During the passing months, I sifted through a weighty stack of MI's fake intelligence reports. The next one clearly illustrated MI's illiteracy, ineptitude, and dishonesty.

Report Number: TB/014/96 Subject: Srilanka/EO
Date compiled by Handler: 2/01/96

1. Tony Bucinam [sic] and Eben [sic] Barlow recruited foreign mercenaries during October 1995. No RSA or EO members were approached.
2. The recruited members were to fight against the Srilanka rebels, the Tamil Tigers.
3. The group was very successful and it was the first time on twenty years that the Tamil Tigers were defeated in battle.
4. Eben Barlow and EO received much praise for the operation.

Neither Executive Outcomes nor myself had been in Sri Lanka, and Buckingham had never discussed that country with me. The statement that no EO members had been approached to partake in this false action, followed by the claim that EO had 'received

much praise', was a glaring contradiction the analysts failed to recognise. The media were not even able to recognise this error, and shortly thereafter, the story had morphed into a published claim about EO being active in Sri Lanka.

Report Number: 6201/04/96 Subject: PW
Date compiled by Handler: 12-06-96

1. The King Air that was used as the first PW[419] is currently standing in Luanda.

The PW is currently awaiting spares from the USA.

2. The West Wing [sic] that was bought by EO from the British [sic] Air Force and modified by MI6 is fully equipped with the latest British technology, aerial photography and computers.
3. The aircraft is also equipped with extra fuel tanks with the aim to be used by EO forces anywhere in Africa.

Aside from reinforcing previous fabrications, MI were now attempting to 'prove' that Executive Outcomes was a front-company for the British Secret Service, and I faced several very hostile investigations from the SAPS regarding my so-called involvement with MI6 as a British agent. The source of their so-called spy-hunting episodes was the characteristically devious and dishonest MI. I also suspected that Colonel JAB Swart, the Special Forces counter-intelligence commander, was a driving force behind this fake report. It seems we were considered an 'enemy of the state' and required monitoring—along with increased budget with which to do it. Incidentally, the equipment referred to was purchased and installed in South Africa.

Report Number: 6202/0078/96 Subject: Dean la Vey.
Date compiled by Handler: 02-07-96

1. Dean la-Vey was shot dead in Midrand in RSA on the 9/02/96.
2. Eben Barlo [sic] seems to have planned the murder.

A report about this apparent murder appeared in the Afrikaans daily newspaper Beeld on the same day.

Dean la-Vey (UK) was a good friend of mine with whom Executive Outcomes had done business. Dealing mainly in electronic monitoring and counter-measures equipment, he had previously visited South Africa to discuss the role of counter- measures and the equipment being used by the National Intelligence Service in such operations. The story that he had been shot dead was a fabrication so bizarre that it left me wondering why Beeld had decided to publish it. SDCI insinuated that he had been killed because he was a 'supporter' or 'front' for EO, and knew too much about EO and myself. Dean is still very much alive and resides in the UK where he runs his own company. The MI originator couldn't even spell my name correctly.

MI falsely alleged that the author had killed his friend, Dean la-Vey. Beeld published this lie as fact. Dean is still alive and well and living in the UK (photo: Boating Business)

Report Number: 6202/090/96 Subject: diamonds
Date compiled by Handler: 16-08-96

1. Lafras Luitingh was on board a Learjet en route from Saurimo to South Africa.
2. The cargo comprised R35 million worth of diamonds that originated from the Lua mine.
3. The aircraft landed at Lanseria.

EO never acted as anyone's diamond courier. Falsely implying that a senior EO member had been involved in illicit diamond smuggling allowed MI and others to feed their own fantasies. The gravity of this allegation (generated by SDCI) was once again ignored. MI and the media were again caught out by their own lies having alleged, firstly that we were being paid in diamonds, and secondly that we had smuggled diamonds to South Africa. They probably never thought we would become privy to their deceit. The SAPS were again tasked to throw resources and money at EO to investigate these allegations.

Report Number: 6202/091/96 Subject: bank accounts and funding Date compiled by Handler: 16-08-96

1. Executive Outcomes bank account does not show any abnormal bank balance.
2. All indications are that their funding and accounts are controlled by MI6 in Britain.

Handler's Comment:
Co-worker tasked to determine which EO front companies are funded by MI6.

The alleged role of MI6 in sponsoring and supporting EO first surfaced after the Soyo affair. SAP officers said it had been initiated by Colonel JAB Swart[420] and regarded as

further proof that we were a front for MI6. This obviously gave NICOC the impression that we were a foreign intelligence service (FIS) asset and therefore a threat to South Africa's national security.

Other taskings generated by these 'intelligence' operatives indicated that they were looking for fire where there wasn't even smoke. I also began to suspect that the agents providing the 'intelligence' were fictitious, and that the handlers were pocketing extra salaries. Ex-MI operative Henri van der Westhuizen later admitted to such actions during his tearful testimony to the TRC. Some of the Essential Elements of Information (EEIs) they generated required answers. These were:

• The nature of Executive Outcomes' logistical supply lines? (Whatever that might mean.)

We were running a logistical supply line that was far longer than the one the SADF had run when it was deployed in Angola. Furthermore we were doing it more efficiently and using far less manpower and fewer aircraft. Maybe they were trying to discover how we were doing it. Or perhaps they wanted to determine flight patterns and routines in hope of shooting our aircraft down with a ground-to-air missile.

• The relationship between Colonel Jan Breytenbach, Willem Ratte, and Executive Outcomes?

With regard to Breytenbach's lies and his view of EO's contract, I would gladly have told the media that I didn't associate with MI propagandists or newly-found friends of UNITA's such as he. I lost my considerable respect for Breytenbach when he made false allegations about EO to the media.

Although I had the greatest respect for Willem Ratte, it was clear that we were standing on opposite sides of the fence insofar as peace and stability in Africa were concerned, and this was especially true regarding UNITA. Willem was still under the misconception that UNITA was a great Christian organisation that would assist South African Christians who needed a safe haven. I was certainly not going to endanger the lives of my men by associating with either of them.

• Where does General Serfontein fit into Executive Outcomes?

I first met General Chris Serfontein when he was a battalion commander (at that time a commandant—Lt Col—in the South West African operational area). He was a competent commander but I had no links with him. Nor was he associated with EO in any manner or form. I could only surmise that MI had decided to target him as some sort of threat to their existence.

The tasking and subsequent so-called 'intelligence reports' about EO were slowly filtered into the press so they would serve to further falsely elaborate on the company's 'illegal' activities—and act as confirmation of the false intelligence MI was generating. Such reports, along with the consequent media coverage, would then be added to the 'evidence dossier' demonstrating our crimes and other mischief.

On 9 July 1996, a document classified 'secret' and titled, 'CI Investigations: Operations Order 8/96, Reference Number TI OND 2/203/7', was developed, and approval for its implementation was sought. The following nonsense appeared under the heading, 'CI Aggressors':

Enemy
Appointment: The CI aggressors currently active with the KVN are:

- ZCIO (Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organisation)
- Executive Outcomes
- Trade unions

Modus Operandi:
The CI aggressors aim to [by means of] espionage, subversion, terrorism and the exploitation of SGOs through KVN[421] personnel negatively influence the following units/personnel:

1. Group 29.
2. 7 SAI (South African Infantry Battalion).
3. 5 SMR

d SMG
e. KVN
3. The priority intelligence requirements....

Own forces:
Handler: The handler is Capt J.F. Booysen Mission

4. S03 CI Inv 2 Captain J. F. Booysen must over the period and on a day- to-day basis gather relevant CI information from CI co-workers in Gauteng to enable the satisfying of the set intelligence requirements.

Command and signals
13. SOl CI Inv 2 Col P.J. van der Merwe is in control of the operation and Capt

J. F Booysen...
14. The handler can be reached on his cell number 0832557287 at any time.

It was clear that there was abundant finance available to waste on us as their request to continue operation TI OND 2/203/7 was approved and the wheels were set in motion to further discredit and smear EO.

The police were frequently called on to investigate both the company and myself. These investigations were all launched off false information and rumour, mainly generated by

MI and trumpeted by the DFA. The media were also invariably informed that EO was 'under investigation' for illegal activities.

As with any large organisation, the SAP had its mix of 'competent' and 'grossly incompetent', 'clever' and 'very stupid' personnel. Policemen who fell into the category of very stupid and grossly incompetent—and perhaps there was a preponderance of them —seemed to be the ones who worked the hardest to make their mark as 'intelligence' officers.

Apart from the threatening letter that was faxed to me by someone in the SAP's Rooiberg office (which, in the opinion of SAP Colonel Serfontein was not a threatening letter and was not faxed from Rooiberg, despite the originator's telefax number having appeared on the letter) there were others hard at work trying to 'criminalise' the company. Perhaps they were being paid, perhaps they were simply bitter that we had never approached them with a job offer. Only they could explain their actions.

A lengthy work of fiction concocted by Detective Warrant Officer J Diedericks accused us of everything from dealing in drugs and attempted murder, to smuggling stolen vehicles, diamonds, and 'red mercury'.[422]

Another secret SAPS report claimed I had been recruited and handled as an agent for the ANC by Mo Shaik.[423] The author of this brilliant piece of fantasy writing also asserted that EO was a front for British Intelligence.

Their ineptitude at gathering intelligence was indeed staggering. In fact, they didn't gather it at all. They just manufactured it to pre-ordered specifications.

The National Intelligence Agency (NIA) obviously not wanting to be outdone by the South African Secret Service (SASS) in the line of false intelligence, also had to justify themselves to remain employed by the new ANC-led government. Since MI had already submitted 'proof' that EO was indeed an FIS-funded and controlled operation (and, according to certain elements in the SAPS, deeply involved in serious organised crime) the company also become a focus point for NIA.

An undated document given to me by an agent I had recruited in NIA claimed the following:

- A researcher called Rina was trying to achieve an in-place recruitment in Executive Outcomes. The document gave Rina's real name, identity number, and a host of other personal information. According to the agent, she was even willing to trade sexual favours for information.
- Lafras Luitingh was involved in extreme right-wing activities and was training and arming right-wingers both within and outside South Africa.
- MI had reported that we were involved in providing military training in Dar- es salaam, Tanzania. This 'vital information' had apparently been obtained from a European businessman who was travelling in Africa when he picked it up. He had given it to a member of the Natal Parks Board who, as a good South African citizen, had sold it to MI in turn.
- We were planning to eliminate a certain Fred Cave or Fred Sage.

It seemed that certain SAPS and NIA members had also started warming to the disinformation game in order to justify their budgets and jobs.

Also playing the field was NIA operative Riaan Stander,[424] assisted by his colleagues, Louis Sieberts, Rolf van Rooyen, and a certain Van Eck. These operatives were involved with NIA's 'Special Project G'. Part of that brief was a campaign codenamed Operation Hammer,[425] a massive fraud and money laundering undertaking. The idea was to establish a financial institution that would support covert operations. Their documents added Executive Outcomes as a major player in the operation—and if it was compromised, EO would be blamed. In the process, it appears embezzlement became the name of the game. Coupled to the NIA team was a certain Peter Richter of the US-based Kroll & Associates.

Known as Agent 5435, Stander was in later years engaged by the State Security Agency[426] (SSA) to conduct espionage operations against right-wing movements. As his handler would later comment, "a lot of information submitted by 5435 could not be verified." Apparently Stander even concocted 'intelligence' on the AWB despite it having met its demise in 2010.

An agent close to Stander later informed me that Richter had a 'very close relationship' with journalist Khareen Pech,[427] and that she had been used as a conduit for their disinformation—allowing her to write articles on Executive Outcomes based on their 'intelligence'. Pech, in order to prove her brilliance as a journalist, even concocted her own stories on EO. After publication, the NIA agents would generate new information to confirm the press reports. That explained why we were continually forced to fight fires we were never able to douse.

Pech by then was well known to me and I often marvelled at how coincidentally her material matched so many of the MI intelligence reports that came into my possession. Discovering that her father was a senior officer in Military Intelligence made the connection clear. Conversely, much of what Stander reported in his so-called intelligence briefs matched what Pech was writing about. Some other journalists speculated that her relationship with Richter, Stander, and his organisation was the source of her wealth—as she always had more money than most journalists.

A journalist would later say the following about Pech:

I was shown a few of Ms Pech's stories. It was obvious the lady was not an expert at all.

I was once shown an article where she claimed that Special Forces had a strength of around 3 500 men—Special Forces never had anything like a strength of 3 500 men. She also spoke of '32 Buffalo Battalion' when the unit was really known as 32 Battalion. 'Buffalo Battalion' was a nickname that came from the unit insignia. She spoke of Special Branch of the police—when in fact she should have said 'Security Branch'. There was however one thing that worried me, and had many of my colleagues talking: Where the fuck did her money come from? And why was she always so happy to share her conspiracies, speculations, and theories with other journalists? Journalism is not a well-paid job. Journalists are not wealthy. Ms Pech did some work for TV—but her jobs there

were only ever temporary. The work she did certainly wouldn't have paid for the gold Tag Heuer watch she wore and boasted with.

What did strike me was that she was very, very interested in EO. Almost as though it was a full time job of hers. She was obsessed with EO in a sick way. She even claimed to have seen EO's 'bucket loads of cash' in Luanda. And then there were her conspiracy theories. She mentioned stories of EO being involved in chemical warfare, of EO trying to acquire an atom bomb, and of EO operating this vast network of soldiers of fortune all over the world. She also mentioned how terribly dangerous EO and its people were…how many mysterious killings had been linked to EO.

Given her expensive lifestyle, I suspected Pech was masquerading as more than just an agent and a fake journalist.

In one discussion with Lafras, I commented, "I wonder who is handling whom?" An article by Stephan Laufer had clearly been constructed from intelligence from MI and Laufer was a known Soviet agent. Pech's intelligence, likewise came from MI but she also had some NIA intelligence in her mix. NIA's intelligence was made up of MI's reports. Stander and Richter were apparently on more than just friendly terms with Pech. It seemed to me that the services had joined forces to confirm each other's lies, and that they were using a very willing and well-paid Pech to further their aims.

According to the same agent, who was close to him, Stander signed his reports 'Anonymous'. During 1998, four documents were produced by Anonymous, all concealed under a 'Top Secret' classification. These reports had apparently been forwarded to President Thabo Mbeki for decisive action. They were also forwarded to the NICOC for attention and action.

Document 1 gave a brief description of plans that were being made to destabilise Africa and overthrow the ANC-led government.

In his leading paragraph, 'Anonymous' stated, 'although it is not an in-depth report, all the names, strategies and incidents are real and factual, and can be proved by the author'.

The list of the persons involved included Eben [sic] Barlow and Lafras Luitingh, along with several ex-SADF generals and police generals.

On page 4 was written: 'the training of Inkatha, large so-called security groups on a national basis, Executive Outcomes soldiers and former intelligence personnel etc, refers.' The author then stated that there were training camps in Sierra Leone, Abidjan, Northern Natal, and the Northern Province.

The document went on to say, 'the ongoing conflicts in Rwanda, the Congo, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Angola, refers. Executive Outcomes is currently involved in most of these countries'.

It accused Executive Outcomes of:

- Being responsible for numerous armed robberies, farm attacks, and theft of state property.
- Running campaigns to discredit senior ANC officials.
- Escalating the number of violent acts.

• Aiming to 'increase the crime rate to the extreme'.
• Being responsible for the theft of state property as part of an EO 'strategy'.
• Being active in foreign-currency fraud aimed at destabilising the economies of neighbouring African countries.

The document ended:

The ultimate plan of the 'new CCB' (read Executive Outcomes) is:
• Discrediting the ANC in every possible way.
• The instigation of public violence.
• The increase in crime and violence.
• The build-up and strengthening of Inkatha and other right-wing groups (Boere Weerstand Beweging, Volksfront, Holomisa/Meyer, etc.)
• The creation of infrastructures through front companies, security companies, and alarm companies throughout South Africa to obtain, control, and gather information.
• Their ultimate goal: a de facto coup to 'restore the chaos and law and order' created by themselves but blamed on the ANC government.
• Their final objective is to regain control of the country by 2004.

Document 2 was also classified 'Top Secret', and addressed to the 'General Manager, Special Projects'. Its originator was 'The Manager, Special Projects'.
Selected extracts from the section titled 'Executive Outcomes' read as follows:

It became possible to access extremely sensitive information regarding EO's current operations. The full list of their current operations, some bank accounts and front companies were obtained over the past few days:

1. The movements of some of their operatives are monitored from three different venues in and around Pretoria. (Various offices in Centurion, one in Meyers park and one office in Hatfield).[428]
2. At least two of the generals and one covert operator were penetrated and information is now forthcoming on a regular basis.
3. One of these generals, Dries van der Litt, the owner of the 'Cockpit' stated that EO has moved off-shore. They are now publishing very strong disinformation over the internet and other media regarding their operations. They are doing this to bypass new legislation in South Africa.
4. A number of the larger security companies, founded and funded by Executive Outcomes, the police and the military, have joined forces with the banks, insurance companies, and big business.
5. Funds which were stolen from pseudo operations under the old regime became legitimate through these foreign accounts.
6. Executive Outcomes will also be playing a crucial role in the forthcoming elections. They are assisting the UDM financially and also strategically'.

The Manager, Special Projects, added a list of companies to his Top Secret report, several of which were unknown to me at that time. According to him, they were either front companies for EO or cooperating with it to overthrow the South African government. This list included:

- Sierra Rutile, an Australian-owned mining company active in Sierra Leone.
- Plaza International, a UK-based and owned consortium that we had a friendly relationship with.
- Heritage Oil.
- Ranger Oil.
- Jardine Fleming of Hong Kong: Banking and Investments.
- Water Ford Holdings.
- Defence Systems Ltd.
- MI6, the British foreign intelligence service.
- MPRI, a US-based and government sponsored company active in training armies around the world.
- SCL Limited.

At the foot of the list was a note that read, 'All data certified as correct on 18 September 1998. The Analyst'. By that time, EO had already closed its doors but this was conveniently overlooked.

That such lies could be certified as 'correct' by an NIA analyst was indeed shocking.

Personalities, apart from myself, Lafras Luitingh, and Nico Palm, who were also alleged to be involved in such sinister actions included:

- Sir David Steele
- Tony Buckingham
- Jardine Fleming[429]
- General Magnus Malan
- General Jannie Geldenhuys
- Adolf Malan
- Joe Verster

Unfortunately there was little we could do about the defamation. NIA, more than any other service, had an open door to government. I had also opened my door to NIA and invited them to discuss any concerns they might have had directly with me instead of relying on MI, DFA, SAPS, Strategic Concepts, and the media. They also had unlimited funds at their disposal which enabled them to justify their actions. Likewise, the media were effectively unapproachable as they had become a mouthpiece for sensitive government sources that they refused to question.

Document 3 was also a 'Top Secret' report. It discussed, in supposed detail, how a right-wing group codenamed 'Stinger' was going to conduct a destabilising mission to overthrow the ANC-led government. Executive Outcomes was alleged to be the

mastermind behind this group. Once again, this document was pure fiction dressed up as fact.

Document 4, dated 5 October 1998, was a regurgitation of Document 2 above. A covering letter accompanying this document stated: 'This report and diagrams were prepared by two agents who infiltrated the Executive Outcomes and some of their front companies.'

False information regarding our bank accounts was attached to the document which claimed that we had one account under the name Infracom (Pty) Ltd in Arcadia, Pretoria and another under the name Executive Outcomes with the Jardine Fleming Bank in Port Moresby, Hong Kong. 'Anonymous' was apparently unaware that Port Moresby is in Papua New Guinea and not in Hong Kong. He wrote that the balance in this account was US$36 million, and that the signatories were Tony Buckingham, Simon Mann, Magnus Malan, Jannie Geldenhuys, and Adolf Malan. This was certainly news to Lafras, Nico, and myself.

What surprised me was that NIA's Special Projects had no knowledge of our South African bank accounts—all in the name of Executive Outcomes and in three different currencies. Had they known this, they would probably have identified them as even more 'proof' of our sinister motives, despite the fact that the SA Reserve Bank and the South African Receiver of Revenue had been instrumental in creating these accounts.

Documents containing misinformation regarding EO were provided by 'agents', compiled and certified as 'correct' by 'analysts', and forwarded to all the foreign intelligence services that South Africa liaised with. They were also circulated to sympathetic members in the UN and formed the foundation of the UN's distorted views of the company. Underpinning this garbage were the misrepresentations created by Sean Cleary of Strategic Concepts and Rusty Evans of Foreign Affairs.

Not only did the intelligence services' smear campaign lead to huge financial losses for Executive Outcomes—it also severely damaged South Africa's reputation within Africa; African governments, well aware of the facts, believed the newly elected ANC to be part of the campaign to prevent EO from helping them. This damage to South Africa's reputation lingers to this day.

While many journalists treated the disinformation as fact and regurgitated it into the press, others, like De Wet Potgieter,[430] went on to write their own books. A short extract illustrating his take on the situation follows:

'One of the absurdities of the South African situation is that the managing director of Executive Outcomes, Eeben Barlow, was a top combat officer with the crack SADF's 32 Battalion, serving under Colonel Jan Breytenbach in Angola against the very people the MPLA government he serves today by recruiting his one-time comrades-inarms, and paying them with foreign blood money to wage a war on behalf of their once sworn enemies'. To add insult to injury, Barlow and two of his senior partners at Executive Outcomes used to work for the SA Defence Forces' dirty tricks department the CCB.

Many years later, General 'Witkop' Badenhorst, the ex-head of Chief of Staff, Military Intelligence, would tell me:

It was only towards the end of my career that I discovered Potgieter was indeed working for the Directorate of Special Tasks (DST). DST was the directorate within MI that was assisting UNITA and other so-called liberation armies throughout Southern Africa. In particular, he worked very closely with Jakkie Snyman. Of course, we paid him a significant amount of money.

Joernalis was 'betaalde agent'

The Afrikaans daily, Beeld reported on Potgieter's role as an agent in 1996

Another astonishing fabrication was penned by Roger Moore and Linda de Hoyos. Published in the Executive Intelligence Review (EIR) of 31 January 1997 under the headline, 'Executive Outcomes Ties Lead to London and Bush', I was reliably informed that it had been fed to the NICOC as a so-called 'working document'. I quote this classic of perfidy in full:

'Exposes appearing on both sides of the Atlantic on the mercenary group Executive Outcomes, threaten to blow the lid off the British intelligence nexus already identified as responsible for the February 1986 murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, and for the current cataclysmic destabilisation of Africa on behalf of circles associated with the Queen of England's Privy Council and Sir George Bush. The exposes appeared in the French daily, Le Figaro on Jan. 16, the London Observer on Jan. 17, and the February issue of the American magazine, Harper's.

Executive Outcomes is the mercenary arm of a vast network of British-South African corporations dealing in gold, diamonds, and oil, primarily, but not exclusively, in Africa, that come under the umbrella of Strategic Resources Corporation, headquartered in Pretoria, South Africa. Described universally as an 'advance guard of a corporate network that includes mining, oil, and construction companies', Executive Outcomes is active in thirteen African countries, including Uganda. For its services, it demands a lien or franchise on the exportable raw resources, particularly mineral wealth, of the client country in the same fashion as the British East India Company of the 18th and 19th centuries, which in turn functioned as the 'advance guard' of the British monarchy.

Executive Outcomes was incorporated offshore, on the Isle of Man, in 1993, by Anthony Buckingham, a British businessman, and Simon Mann, a former British officer, the Observer reported, based on a leak to it from British Intelligence. Buckingham is also chief executive of Heritage Oil and Gas, which in turn is linked to the Canadian firm Ranger Oil. Other firms operating out of the same headquarters in Chelsea Plaza 107,

London, include Branch International Ltd. and Branch Mining Ltd. Preliminary investigation by EIR has further determined that Executive Outcomes lies at the heart of the British monarch's raw materials cartels and secret intelligence operations, in conjunction with Bush's rogue apparatus.

Through Sir David Steel, a former leader of the Liberal Party, Executive Outcomes and, presumably, its deployment, is a subsumed operation of the Queen's Privy Council. Steel is a close friend of EO's Buckingham, and is on the board of directors of EO's sister firm, Heritage Oil and Gas, according to Le Figaro. In 1977, Steel was inducted into the Privy Council, making him the youngest member of Britain's highestlevel policy-making body.

The links between Executive Outcomes and Ranger Oil point to operational ties with the Bronfman family of Canada, whose scion, Edgar Bronfman of Toronto Broncorp, sits on the board of directors of Ranger. Recently, the Bronfman family merged its mammoth real estate firm, Trizec, with Barrick Gold, whose senior advisory board includes Sir George Bush. Barrick Gold is deeply involved in northeastem Zaire, where it has purchased 83 000 square kilometres of land. Zairean sources report that the so-called Zairean rebel Laurent Kabila is no more than a mercenary for Barrick and Anglo American Corp, sponsored by the British Crownbacked Ugandan and Rwandan militaries. Executive Outcomes, (Le Figaro) and other sources further verify, is deeply entrenched in Uganda, the key British marcher-lord state in the region.

[INTERJECTION: There's an earlier thread with Greg Palast's piece about Barrick]

The ability of Executive Outcomes to thrive as privatised warlords, it is believed, is in part due to the privatisation of US intelligence services by George Bush, who, as vice president, beginning in 1981, carried out Executive Order 12333, which placed all US intelligence operations under Bush's personal control.

This may be another reason why Executive Outcomes is deeply enmeshed in the same networks exposed in a South African courtroom in September 1996, as responsible for the successful assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. During the trial of Colonel Eugene de Kock, on 89 counts of murder, conspiracy, and fraud, it was revealed that De Kock, along with spy-turned- National Party politician Craig Williamson, had planned the hit on Palme, which, according to de Kock's co-worker, Brigadier Johan 'Dirk' Coetzee, was carried out by another former South African intelligence agent, James Anthony 'Ant' White. The entire nexus designated, was part of the covert death squad unit of the South African military policy, called C-10. Executive Outcomes is from similar turf. Its executive director, Eeben Barlow, is a former South African Special Forces officer, who organised Executive Outcomes from the 'Koevoet', according to well- informed South African sources. The Koevoet is a small police unit that carried out assassinations during apartheid, and was also named by EIR as involved in 'Third Force'' operations to provoke black-on-black violence. Craig Williamson was the primary trainer of Koevoet.

In its October 1996 Special Report, 'George Bush and the 12333 Serial Murder Ring', EIR took note of Williamson's direct ties to Executive Outcomes. Williamson was a key on-the-ground organiser for Operation Lock, the brainchild of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Prince Philip of England, to carry out 'wetworks'[431] on behalf of their

World Wildlife Fund in Africa. The EIR report documents that 'another outfit, employed by Williamson, to funnel manpower to [Col. Ian] Crooke and Operation Lock, was Executive Outcomes, headed by Eeben Barlow, a former South African military officer who had been active in Angola, providing support to Savimbi's UNITA, but later contracted his 'private' security services to the Angolan government. Evidence points to Executive Outcomes being a direct and likely the biggest spinoff of the British Special Air Services (SAS), formed in 1941 by the late Lieutenant Colonel David Stirling. The SAS lies outside the British government's official military structure, and is accountable to the Sovereign Queen only. According to the British Army handbook, the SAS—similar to EO today—is 'particularly suited, trained, and equipped for counter-revolutionary operations', specializing in 'sabotage', 'assassination', as well as 'liaison with organisation, training, and control of friendly guerrilla forces operating against the common enemy'. Among the sister firms of Executive Outcomes operating out of Chelsea Plaza 107 is Capricorn Systems Ltd. As the Observer writes: 'It is suspected that the name Capricorn originates with the Capricorn Africa Society', established by the eccentric military hero who founded SAS, Sir David Stirling, and who was himself involved in mercenary operations before his death in 1990. Another company which took the name was Capricorn Air, which delivered the first EO troops into Angola in 1993.

In southern Africa, among Stirling's offspring mercenary services was Kilo Alpha Services (KAS), run by Operation Lock's Colonel Crooke. Reports state that, on Stirling's death, KAS was bought up by Sir Jimmy Goldsmith, the British mogul who also figured in the Public Diplomacy Donors' List, the key private financiers for George Bush's illegal Iran-Contra operations in the 1980s.

End it now, or it is the Future.

The Clinton administration has opposed the use of Executive Outcomes by governments in Africa. It has officially asked the Angolan government of President Jose dos Santos to usher Executive Outcomes, whose services destroyed the capacities of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, out the door. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns reiterated on January 23, in answer to a question by {EIR} correspondent William Jones, 'We are aware that there are mercenary groups that hired themselves out on one side or another in a variety of African countries in the past, certainly in Angola and Sierra Leone. We understand what Executive Outcomes is. I've done my homework over the last 24 hours. Our advice to the Angolans, to the Sierra Leoneans, and our advice to all the actors in eastern Sudan these days, is not to hire mercenary outfits.'

The ideology of the personnel of Executive Outcomes is doubly noxious for the Clinton administration. Barlow told (Harper's) reporter Elizabeth Rubin that he 'encourages his men to read up on the works of two of Newt Gingrich's gurus, the futurologists Heidi and Alvin Toffler, whose book (War and Anti-War) offers the pop version of Martin Van Creveld's (The Transformation of War) published in 1991, which argues that wars waged by nation states will be replaced by 'war-making entities' such as mercenary bands, religious organisations, and commercial organisations such as the British East India Company.

Africa is now the testing ground for this theory. In Sierra Leone, it has won the war for the government against the Revolutionary Front demanding in return a full franchise on Sierra Leone's diamonds—leading to suspicions that EO is a front for the De Beers diamond cartel. In Uganda, EO's liaison officer, according to Le Figaro, is the half-brother of President Museveni, Salem Saleh. Branch Energy, one of the EO branches, is active in Uganda, and has hived off 25% of its shares there to Salim Saleh directly, and another 45% to Saleh's Saracen Uganda.· The latter is suspected of contributing to financing both the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front and John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army. In addition, EO personnel guard the Karamoja gold mines in northeastem Uganda, which are believed to be jointly owned by Museveni and the family of Baroness Lynda Chalker.

Executive Outcomes' presence in Uganda shows that it is key to the mercenary war waged by entities such as Barrick Gold and Anglo American Corp., to seize the mineral-laden eastern Zaire and the gold... and oil-rich south of Sudan. They are to be appropriated as private holdings, in the same way that Belgium's King Leopold ran the Congo as a personal slave labour estate for 80 years. EO is the vanguard of the British monarchy's recolonisation of Africa an operation that has already cost hundreds of thousands of African lives in the last five years, and promises to cost millions more.'

Another similar 'story' (undated) was fed to the NICOC and later passed to me. The author was not known.

'This commercial enterprise has given EO its nickname, 'the diamond dogs of war'. A recent United Nations report noted that once a firm like EO is able to establish security in an area 'it apparently begins to exploit the concessions it has received by setting up a number of associates and affiliates' which engage in 'legitimate' businesses'. Such firms thus acquire 'a significant, if not hegemonic, presence in the economic life of the country in which it is operating'.

One of the Plaza 107 group firms is Branch Energy (BE), an English corporation which registered in the Isle of Man, as a tax haven, in April 1994. EO is a major shareholder in BE, with 60 per cent of BE Angola, 40 per cent of BE Uganda, and 40 per cent of BE Sierra Leone. In June 1996 BE merged with Carson Gold, controlled by Canadian mining magnate Robert Friedland, to form Diamond Works Inc. This company, which has prospecting rights in Congo, Namibia, Botswana and Senegal, and is now the second largest concession holder in Angola, was recently awarded the Alto Kwanza diamond exploration concession in Bie Province, covering an area of more than 18 000 sq. km. In July 1996 the Sierra Leone government awarded the company a twenty-five year lease to the Koidu diamond fields in the Kono region 'liberated' by EO, Diamond Works has contracted Lifeguard another SRC subsidiary, at US$60 000 a month to protect its diamond fields in Sierra Leone.

Another line of analysis suggests that the prime mover in the employment of EO in Sierra Leone came from the South African mining house Gencor. In 1996 Gencor sold its controlling interest in the Australian company Cudgen RZ to another Australian firm, Renison Goldfields Consolidated (RGC). A subsidiary of RGC, Consolidated Rutile Ltd.,

in partnership with the US firm Nord Resources Group, controls half of Sierra Rutile Ltd, which with an annual production worth US$200 Million a year is the largest rutile mine in the world. The mine was the regional headquarters for EO during their operations in West Africa and when they withdrew Sierra Rutile Ltd. took out a contract with Lifeguard.

Pete Sawyer was a British 'investigative journalist' who apparently had a very cosy relationship with the South African intelligence services. In his special 'Background Report' on EO he stated:

Organisation

Executive Outcomes' corporate structure is highly elaborate and winds around the globe. It is constantly evolving and changing. Therefore all I can present is a general snapshot.

There are two companies called Executive Outcomes. One is based in the UK, and the other in Pretoria, South Africa. The South African company is controlled by a Bahamas-registered company called Strategic Resources Corporation. Some key personnel. Here are some details of some, but not all, of the key personnel involved with Executive Outcomes and the companies with which it has links:

Luther Eeben Barlow, security expert, aged 42, South African National, Special Forces background. Barlow probably coordinates the military and security know- how and planning for the organisation. Several sources have told me that he was involved with the Civil Cooperation Bureau's Westem European operation based in Knightsbridge, London. They suggest that because of this involvement he may have changed his name at some point in the past…

The numerous agents, journalists, consultants, experts, and others, who lied about us (and some happily received payment to do so) came to be regarded as 'specialists' on Executive Outcomes. Some of their disinformation was even used in 'academic' theses. They were so expert that they discovered things about Executive Outcomes that even we didn't know. Even more interesting was the way one journalist's lies would leapfrog into another's story and be enhanced with more disinformation before others continued to elaborate. I did not think that was purely coincidental.

It is no small wonder that the South African government, bombarded as it was with lies from every quarter, was forced to view Executive Outcomes with concern and alarm.

In 2017 while revising the original manuscript, I offered an olive branch to all ex-intelligence officers who had worked against EO. I undertook not to divulge their identities or expose them for the liars they were if they came clean. Several stepped forward to ask for 'forgiveness' for the roles they had played in smearing Executive Outcomes. Most of the information they came with merely served to confirm what I already knew.

Several of these ex-intelligence officers told me that a 'higher authority' had instructed them to 'make up' anything that could be construed as plausible to stop the company and

force its closure ‘at any cost’. Some claimed their instructions came from ‘cabinet members’.

The following are some of the lies that were generated and shared with other interested parties:

3. Military Intelligence’s initial brief to their agents in the press was that EO consisted of ageing, alcohol-soaked, ex-soldiers who posed no threat to UNITA. They intimated, in the same breath, that the force was about to invade UNITA-held areas —despite being fully aware that EO had actually been contracted to conduct a security task. The disinformation resulted in Rapport’s dramatic headline, ‘SA Fighters in Angola’. This was a considered method of warning UNITA that a force of ex-SADF members had entered Angola. It was also believed that such a story would ‘pacify’ UNITA and give them the confidence to fight the men at Soyo. This was indeed what happened as UNITA launched attack after attack to regain the area after having lost it to a joint FAA-EO force. The journalist Edith Bulbring was also ‘informed’ that EO’s actual mission was to attack and capture Jamba and she dutifully printed this lie. Others in the press were fed additional disinformation to drum up support and sympathy for UNITA, as well as to intimate that EO was acting illegally.
4. Efforts to present EO as a company of mercenaries willing to fight for whichever government would pay most was an attempt to make the Angolan government and Sonangol distrust EO. It was hoped that they would suspect us of negotiating with UNITA behind the scenes. The impression they hoped to create was that, offered enough money, we we would promptly switch sides and join UNITA. To generate this distrust, and to shape the perceptions of Western governments and the UN, members of the press under control of the intelligence services were tasked to ensure that EO members were referred to as ‘mercenaries’ in every article. This label was picked up by the international media and the UN was urged to investigate EO and its role in mercenarism. Special documents were generated, classified ‘Secret’, and linked to the press, intimating that the MI had intelligence that EO was willing to switch sides to UNITA.

[432] Both the Department of Foreign Affairs and Military Intelligence pressured the South African Police to ‘investigate’ EO/myself as the company was disrupting their plans to use Soyo as a harbour through which to ship weapons and equipment. It had been stated, during a ‘classified meeting’ that Soyo was a strategic delivery point, especially as it was close to Zaire which was already being used as a diamond-collection point and conduit for illegal weapons supplies. This was confirmed by a friend in Special Forces who warned me that we were creating ‘a massive problem’ as Soyo was the delivery point for certain arms deals already concluded with UNITA. During this meeting—at which a cabinet member and a ‘civilian advisor’ had been present—initial options to ‘neutralise’ me were also briefly discussed. As a vital oil producing area and on-shore facility, Soyo was also strategically valuable to the Angolan government. The SAP, it was hoped, would immediately arrest me and those who were assisting me for ‘undisclosed criminal activities’. They also told the SAP that my house (which I was also using as an office) had been purchased with the proceeds from ‘illegal activities’. When no arrest were forthcoming, the press were told that I had purchased the property with the money the Angolans were paying me despite me having owned the property long before Soyo was even mentioned. This lie was published as fact. Some in the press later described this property as EO’s ‘sinister’ headquarters. Others described it as a ‘lavish home’. It was neither.

4. The size of the EO group in Soyo was constantly exaggerated in attempts to get UNITA to increase their force levels against EO. The supposed size of the EO group was passed to 'trusted journalists' who were asked to print the 'intelligence'. This also helped create the perception that EO was becoming a dangerously large force of out-of-control ex-soldiers that were acting illegally and committing crimes with impunity.
5. A senior DST member (apparently) sent several messages to his contacts in UNITA, urging them to kill every EO member in Soyo. According to the source of this information, UNITA was also warned that EO's actual intention was to 'murder Savimbi'. This lie motivated UNITA to launch the final mass assault that resulted in the EO force withdrawing on the Texaco vessel (the FAA recaptured Soyo shortly thereafter). UNITA's initial reports to their masters indicated that all EO men had been killed or were 'missing'. This 'news' was immediately passed to several journalists who bombarded me with phone calls, asking what had happened in Soyo, where my men were, what was I doing to rescue/recover them, what the SAP was going to do with me, and why I had knowingly sent men to their deaths.
6. In an attempt to discredit EO and raise concerns amongst family members, a story about the EO men in Angola having been kept in a virtual prison, forced to eat their fallen comrades to survive (as a result of bad logistics) was leaked to Rapport. The published story aimed to raise concerns on the home front, and cannibalism was added to the list of our supposed 'criminal activities'.
7. I had, in conjunction with several insurance houses, apparently devised a scheme whereby I would become the sole beneficiary of all insurance benefits due to any employee who died in service of the company, hence, the more men died the wealthier I would become. It was hoped that this story would collapse the company by motivating EO employees to resign en masse. This deception is, to this day, regurgitated by several disgruntled ex-EO/ex-32 Bn members and a retired senior officer of the battalion. Collective stupidity knows no bounds.
8. I was planning to assassinate President Nelson Mandela and intended to plunge South Africa into chaos after the 1994 elections. EO was to be the vehicle I would use. After overthrowing the post-1994 government, EO would install its own government in South Africa. On closer consideration, MI decided not to propagate this lie because the services had already submitted a report claiming that EO had signed a 'secret agreement' with the ANC-led government. It also contradicted top secret documents written by 'Anonymous'.
9. In the hope of gaining favour with UNITA, I had apparently provided them with a SAM-7 surface-to-air missile with which to shoot down an EO aircraft. My initial plan was supposedly for UNITA to shoot down an EO Boeing ferrying men to or from South Africa. I would then claim all the insurance monies. I had, however, lost my nerve and requested UNITA rather to shoot down the aircraft piloted by Louwrens Bosch. The downing of this aircraft resulted in the deaths of Louwrens and Skeeries—and I, of course, had supposedly benefited from their insurance payouts.

10. As I was hoping to get a training contract from UNITA once they won the war against FAA, I was secretly providing UNITA with intelligence of FAA/EO deployments. As a result of this deception having been fed to the media, some journalists reported that EO was supporting both FAA and UNITA. The lie was aimed at creating distrust and animosity between FAA and EO in hope that EO personnel would be arrested and imprisoned in Angola, thus causing EO to collapse and UNITA to win the war. It was also hoped that EO men who believed I had betrayed them would resign from the company and come after me.
11. Part of a plan to force EO out of Angola in the mid-1990s was a fabricated report alleging that I had planned, coordinated, and been involved in the bombing of the US embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. The bombing took place on 18 April 1983 and seventeen US citizens—mostly CIA and US military personnel lost their lives in the explosion. This 'intelligence' was published in a classified internal DFA document and later passed to the US via a liaison channel. It was believed that the fabrication would result in an international arrest warrant being issued against me for terrorism. The US obviously had better intelligence and subsequently discovered that the attack had been carried out by radical Islamists. MI conveniently forgot to investigate my whereabouts at the time. I had been attending the army's Combat Team Commander's course at the Army Battle School, Lohatla.
12. Due to a misguided belief that EO would cease to operate if I died, several attempts to assassinate me were planned. I was aware of two failed attempts on my life, but unaware of several others. These apparently included placing a bomb beneath my car, a mugging and killing in a parking garage, poisoning food in my house, a car hijacking gone wrong, and several other hare brained schemes. The task to kill me was eventually given to a CI officer who refused it, and subsequently resigned from the military. Another CI officer (a friend of mine) confirmed this plan to me at a later date. The task was then given to Eugene de Kok who visited my offices—on my invitation—with his hanger- on Henri van der Westhuizen. During this visit I confronted de Kok about his 'contract' to kill me. Denying the 'contract', de Kok immediately reported back to the contracting parties that he had been compromised and was therefore unable to continue. De Kok, during his TRC testimony, apparently stated that he had tried to warn me of a plot to kill me. He lied.
13. In an effort to deflect blame and hide the South African government's involvement in the arming and training of the parties prior to and during the Rwandan genocide, a story was leaked to the media that EO was the guilty party. Apparently, Lafras and I had planned the genocide and expected to make huge financial gains from it. A similar story concerning Burundi, again to hide South Africa's involvement there, was leaked to the media who faithfully published it.
14. Given my apparent engagement in serious organised crime, I had undergone several name changes to avoid being arrested by the South African authorities. Khareen Pech also claimed, in one of her numerous false and misleading ISS articles on EO, that I had changed the colour of one of my eyes—an action that would have

bordered on mental derangement. The fabrication was later picked up by other journalists and published as fact.

15. I was apparently in the process of arming and equipping EO with sophisticated and modern equipment such as fighter aircraft, helicopters, tanks, artillery, and other support. My plan was supposedly to create a 'private army' and then invade African countries rich in mineral resources. EO would then 'sell those countries to the highest bidder' and walk away with massive profits. This story made its appearance in part in the media, under claims that EO was a private army at the forefront of neo-colonialism.
16. I was, in conjunction with the governments of Angola and Sierra Leone, planning to have all EO members deployed there killed in order to benefit from their insurance pay outs as well as to hide the 'illegal activities' EO was involved in. Apparently, I was becoming alarmed about EO employees knowing 'too much' and they therefore had to be eliminated.
17. I was operating as an intelligence agent for the governments of the US, the UK, Russia, and France. I was also providing intelligence to both MPLA and UNITA. In order to ensure my monthly payments from my numerous paymasters, I was willing to kill whoever stood in my way. I was also stashing the numerous sums of money I had received as an agent for several governments and parties in numbered, secret bank accounts[433] around the world.
18. A report was fed to a failed British diplomat (Patrick Haseldine)[434]— apparently an ardent UNITA apologist and supporter—claiming that I had personally planned and overseen the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on 21 December 1988 which had resulted in the deaths of 259 passengers and crew. Several residents of the town below had also been killed. Haseldine later published his 'intelligence' on the internet calling for my immediate arrest and imprisonment. Haseldine was apparently later fired by the British Prime Minister for wrong doings and maladministration.[435]
19. Communist forces were using EO to threaten western interests in Africa and

elsewhere. It was believed that such a claim, coming from an intelligence service, would bring foreign pressure to bear on the governments that had contracted us.

20. MI operatives were tasked to make continuous telephone calls to the EO offices for the purpose of clogging up the lines. This would prevent possible client governments from making contact with us as they would be unable to reach us.
21. One report implied that an IRA member had been instrumental in assisting me to create EO. The aim of this report was to create animosity towards EO in the UK, given its apparent link to the IRA. It was hoped that this information would result in me being arrested when I entered the UK.
22. My resignation from EO was viewed as a ruse. When it was later discovered that I had indeed left EO, the intelligence services needed to claim that I was running EO

remotely. That, they believed, would ensure their jobs, secure funds for running operations and, in some instances, enable them to continue lining their own pockets.

23. An MI officer also told me: "One of our biggest fears was that EO would be regarded as a positive force for change in Africa and we had to stop that. To counter you, we leaked a story claiming that 'a company such as EO' would prolong a conflict and it was not in a government's best interests to contract you. We also made it known that you would avoid all accountability and transparency, and that countries were at risk of you seizing their natural resources for own gain. We were willing to do whatever it took to force you out of Africa and shut down your company. Unfortunately, it didn't work as we had intended it to, and when you got a contract in the Far East, we became really worried. When the Papua New Guinea contact came along, we asked some journalists to write that EO had simply morphed into 'Sandline'. Many of us realised the stupidity of what we were doing but we did it nevertheless. The fallout mattered less than our jobs. In retrospect, we were very dumb."

The collective stupidity of those working to force EO's closure by conjuring up false intelligence reports was obvious, but the damage they did to the company was no laughing matter.

I was told, on several occasions, that EO had become a very serious threat to a number of 'senior government officials and large private companies' who held substantial business and other interests (particularly diamonds) in the countries where EO was contracted (especially Angola and Sierra Leone).

To protect their interests, EO had to be stopped at all costs, even if it meant the company's destruction. Armed with huge budgets, sponsored by gullible and uninformed taxpayers, and supported by a very devious media, they set out to do just that, proving that, with authority and power behind it, crime does indeed pay.

I couldn't help smiling when I read journalist Alet Janse van Rensburg's[436] column titled, 'We are all dying of a broken heart'. She wrote:

Being a journalist these days is a tough gig.

I'm not talking about the online harassment and physical threats and having to compete with the most sensational fake news, although I'll get to that.

…

For as long as there has been news, there have been attacks on the media… These attacks are attempts by people who have a lot to lose, to silence the people, to sway opinion away from the incriminating truth and to minimise open public discourse.

…

It is one thing to say that you disagree with the facts, or that you interpret them differently. But it is another thing entirely to discard the truth and replace it with purposefully misleading, false reasoning and fake news. Personal attacks against journalists are a violation of the right of the public to be informed…

On an almost daily basis, both EO and I had to put up with the South African media's harassment and refusal to investigate the origins of their stories or the agendas of their 'undisclosed sources'. Wittingly or unwittingly, they misinformed their readership and were very keen to 'discard the truth and replace it with purposefully misleading, false reasoning and fake news'. Only they can explain why they did it—or why they (apparently—judging by their false and misleading reports) wanted conflicts in Africa to continue.

Regarding her statement,'attacks against journalists are a violation of the right of the public to be informed…': Sadly, the media did not view their attacks against EO and myself as a 'violation of the right of the public to be informed.' Indeed, they seemed to take perverse pleasure in misleading the public with fake stories about EO and myself.

The role the media and their sensitive 'undisclosed sources' played by propagating fake news, lies, and disinformation on EO and myself was undeniable. We were unable to defend ourselves or to ensure honest reporting. Looking back at how the deceptive intelligence services and the equally devious media operated, it is no small wonder that we lost access to the informational environment.

The disinformation war against Executive Outcomes had been won.

Members of the SAS during World War II. MI would later alledge that this is where EO and Capricorn Air's roots lay (Photo Unknown)

46:
The Sting of the Scorpion

I was certainly taken by surprise when I answered an early morning knock on my door on 14 December 2000 and found myself staring down the barrel of a 9mm pistol. It was backed by several more weapons, trained in my direction by officers of the South African Police Service. They had surrounded my house. Hovering in the background were Casspir MRAPs[437] and armed officers from the crack police Task Force unit dressed in body armour with weapons at the ready.

A search warrant was shoved in my face and with that, my house was sealed off and searched. They had assembled an imposing search team; in addition to the SAPS officers, were members of the Investigating Directorate of the Serious Economic Offences unit, a division of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) also known as the 'Scorpions'; officials from the Office of the Attorney General, and a representative from the South African Reserve Bank's Exchange Control Department.

Fortunately, their aggressive stance didn't last long. They soon realised I wasn't about to pull a machine gun out from under my dressing gown and mow them down using the couch in my drawing room as cover. Their approach quickly changed to one of business-like courtesy.

"Would you like to call your attorney?" the Scorpions' special investigator, Johan Hershensohn asked me.

"No, I don't think so—at least not until I've been informed of what crime I am supposed to have committed," I responded.

"Some time during 1998, we were informed that you and your company, Executive Outcomes, had been involved in, or are still involved in, certain serious crimes ranging from actions to destabilise African countries rich in resources to economic and financial contraventions…and others of an unspecified nature. We are here to search for evidence," he said.

He went on to tell me that a 'sensitive NIA source' had provided them with the information that had resulted in the search warrant.

"I haven't committed any crimes that I am aware of so I'm not going to pay an attorney to come over here. Go ahead with your search. If you need any help, just let me know."

The Task Force proceeded to clear the house room-by-room, probably thinking they would find anti-government or dissident forces hiding in my cupboards. Despite my anger, I had to smile at what I realised was another waste of time, effort, and money. The enemies EO and myself had created were still abusing their positions of power and influence.

Not long after the house had been cleared and declared secure, a highly- embarrassed Task Force officer apologised to me for the inconvenience they had caused. It was very obvious that he wasn't happy about the role he and his men had been ordered to play in what I considered another farce. He also informed the chief investigating officer that he

was withdrawing his men from my premises as he felt they had no cause to be there. I told him I harboured no ill feelings towards him; I understood he was merely carrying out orders.

The special investigator then informed me that an NPA case number: 1/4/3—4/99, had been filed against me.

With that, my house was turned inside out and searched with commendable thoroughness. My pistol and rifle were examined and I was asked to produce my firearm licenses. These were scrutinised. My cupboards were emptied and checked, my office, bookcases, and drawers were rummaged through, the titles of my books were noted, and my safe was inspected. My banking statements were perused with equal care. All I could do was watch with mounting anger and frustration. It was obvious that their 'sensitive NIA source' had told them several lies that suggested a massive criminal offence—obviously for payment, I surmised.

I was asked to show them my foreign bank account statements and credit cards. I had none apart from the cheque book and long-expired credit cards I had used during my CCB career. There was some excitement at this find until I told them that the SA Reserve Bank had assisted me in creating the account many years before. Despite the account having been dormant since my abrupt dismissal from the CCB by FW de Klerk (and the account holding the paltry sum of approximately £12.00) this appeared to constitute a 'serious economic offence'.

During the search, more evidence of my wrong-doing was discovered…

The classified notes of the training courses I had presented to Debswana and Special Forces several years earlier were discovered in my bookcase and I was asked why I had secret documents in my possession.

I explained that I had developed and written the course notes and that they were my intellectual property. This resulted in a minor debate during which I was informed that I was not entitled to have classified documents in my possession. Most likely, some members felt they had finally found proof that I was indeed a foreign agent. The notes were seized. No hidden diamonds, barrels of oil, or other valuable resources were found hidden in the house or garden.

After several hours of searching, the investigating officer and his team also apologised for the inconvenience. Despite my barely contained anger at the intrusion on my privacy, I realised that they were not to blame for what had happened.

I was only grateful that the raid had not been 'leaked' to the media beforehand; I could just imagine the glee with which they would have jumped on such a story.

When the search party finally left, they took with them, a single sealed evidence box containing my dormant CCB account, my recent bank statements, and much of the lecture material I had prepared for De Beers and Special Forces.

During the search, I received a panic-stricken phone call from the person who was renting my previous home and EO's old offices at 317 Danny Street, Lynnwood Park, to tell me that the house was being searched by the SAPS and others. Both properties had been subjected to a simultaneous early morning raid. All I could do was apologise for the inconvenience and ask him to cooperate with the search teams.

After the search teams left, I contacted my attorney, Wilna Lubbe, the same lawyer I had used at Executive Outcomes, and who had continued to provide legal assistance to the company after I left.

She immediately wrote to the Scorpions, demanding to know why they had searched my premises and asking what crimes I had supposedly committed.

Their response, dated 13 February 2001, stated:

2. Kindly take note that on 24 October 1998 this office received representations in terms of section 28 of the National Prosecuting Authority Act, No. 32 of 1998 (herein, referred to as 'the Act'). The representations suggest that certain specified offences have been committed by your client, Mr L. Barlow and/or Executive Outcomes…

3 …

4. The Director studied the representations and found that the allegations merit further investigations into possible contraventions... , for a period 1993 to 1997 yourself and Executive Outcomes... He then instituted a preparatory investigation in terms of section 28 (13) of the Act on 15 December 1998, to hear or receive further evidence in order to enable him to determine if there are reasonable grounds to conduct an investigation in terms of section 28 (1) of the Act.

5. Thus far our investigations, inclusive of search and seizure of documents and objects on 14/12/2000 at your client's two premises, suggests that Mr L. Barlow is in an opportune position to furnish us with further information, documents and/or objects pertinent to this investigation. The Director has, instead of issuing a summons, decided to invite your client to appear before him or his duly authorized representatives and to assist this investigation, as promised, by providing the required information at the following address:

Directorate of Special Operations Room D703,
7th Floor, Synodal Centre,
228 Visagie Street,
Pretoria

on 28 February 2001 at 11h00 to enable him or his duly authorized representatives to determine if there are reasonable grounds to convert this preparatory investigation into an investigation in terms of section 28 (1) of the Act.

In it was also a list of additional documents I was to take with me to the interview, including all expired and current passports in my possession.

The letter was signed by Advocate MO Nemugumoni, the Investigating Director of the Scorpions.

A few days later an SAPS officer who had been present during the raid phoned me and asked if he could come to my house as he needed to tell me something 'in confidence'.

"I am truly sorry about the raid on your house," he said when he arrived, "we all knew it was coming but couldn't do anything to warn you."

He went on to tell me that some of the information that had led to the raid had come from an NIA agent by the name of 'Sandy'.

I knew exactly who Sandy was. She had often visited the stable yard where I rode and worked horses, and always tried to strike up flirtatious conversations or ingratiate herself. She had also tried to compromise a friend of mine—a foreign private banker. He had, however, turned the tables on her and severely compromised her.

She had often asked him, apparently after sex with him, whether he held any offshore accounts for me or if he knew of any governments I might be assisting. She was a very poor agent and probably thought no one was aware she was 'spying' on me. To me, she was nothing but an unprofessional slut.

"That's okay with me. As I see it, you were all only doing your jobs so you don't need to apologise. I just wish I knew what prompted the raid and the investigation." "We were all—Scorpions included—embarrassed about what we had to do. You've made powerful enemies in the South African business and government environments and they will stop at nothing to even the score after your involvement in Angola and Sierra Leone…and elsewhere. For what it's worth, most of us are sorry about what happened. We know that this was nothing more than a set-up to harass you. We were even told that you were considering mounting a coup against a

government somewhere."

It was all terribly absurd, but those who had manipulated the situation to hoodwink the public, and hidden their illegal activities under layers of security classifications, were still able to exert influence. Now, it seemed, they were hoping to extract revenge for having had their illegal activities halted by EO and myself.

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The Scorpions' interview was later rescheduled for 28 March. I was accompanied by my costly legal team—Wilna Lubbe and Advocate Alan Lewis.

Facing us from across the table were Advocate AL Bekker, Advocate O Nemugumoni, and Johan Hershensohn—all from the Scorpions, as well as Andre Malherbe from the SA Reserve Bank. The entire proceeding was recorded for later transcription.

They started the investigation by asking me to supply information about myself and Executive Outcomes: when had the company been established and why, what role had the CIA, MI6, the KGB, and other foreign intelligence services played in its establishment and funding, who had it worked for, what equipment had it provided, how legal had its contracts been, and how—and into which bank accounts—had it been paid. I was also asked where EO and myself had been granted mining concessions—and why.

Hostility was noticeably absent from the proceedings. They were conducted in a friendly and professional manner that I, for one, could not fault. Every time we had a break, my 'opponents' from the Scorpions and the Office for Serious Economic Offences joined me in the passage for a cigarette, and we discussed my career in the SADF's 32 Battalion, DCC, CCB, and Executive Outcomes.

After the day-long proceedings, I was told I could go home and that I would be advised of the decision taken vis-a-vis my so-called criminal activities through my legal team.

Several months later, the National Prosecuting Authority stated that it had no grounds to prosecute me. I was, however, subjected to a hefty fine as I had an unauthorised bank account in the UK, despite that account having been used for operations on behalf of the state many years before. I again wondered what the operation to secure my home and the investigation had cost. The documents that had been taken away in an evidence box were returned to me.

I was tired of having to face up to investigations against myself and the company but I was certain that there were several individuals and organisations who were far from happy with the NPA's findings.

To the best of my knowledge, NPA case 1/4/3—4/99 has been closed but I am certain that the lies about both me and Executive Outcomes are still being propagated. Perhaps it has merely turned 'cold' until new 'intelligence' with which to open it can be devised.

47:
Vindication

The methodology of the Stratcom[438] devised and implemented by the DFA, MI, and others vying for their place in the sunshine of our rainbow nation was simple: if you tell a lie often enough, people will start believing it. Once it is believed, it becomes their reality.

The technique involved generating fake intelligence, leaking it to the media to publish, and then submitting intelligence reports that referenced the media articles. This created a Gordian knot of misinformation layers deep as stories mutated with each telling, and eventually conglomerated into a single pervasive myth with Executive Outcomes at its centre.

The campaign also convinced the new ANC-dominated government that the intelligence community was 'impartial' and had South Africa's best interests at heart. Meanwhile they silently plotted to encourage conflict wherever possible. Their plan worked better than even they could have dreamt it would.

Britain's MI6 was quick to jump onto the bandwagon with their secret report on Executive Outcomes ('UK Eyes Alpha'). Using much of MI's disinformation, this secret document was circulated to several UNITA-sympathetic journalists and quickly incorporated as 'background material' to their stories. The document eventually found its way to a young British journalist, Michael Ashworth, who later claimed it had been stolen from his apartment by South African-based journalist Khareen Pech while she was living with him. Pech then published much of it as a factual narrative of EO's activities.

The 'specialist writers' on EO based their entire output on their own agendas and never once consulted us to ensure that what they wrote at least contained a modicum of truth. The facts that I gave them were simply ignored and discarded.

In an effort to achieve its own specific aims, the Midrand-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS—previously known as the Institute of Defence Studies) headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers, coopted Sean Cleary from Strategic Concepts (a major purveyor of false intelligence and disinformation regarding EO) to assist in writing a book that was to be titled, Angola—a case study for private military companies.[439] Pech was also invited to contribute.

Cleary, as Smith had advised me, played an important role in the disinformation game against EO: he needed to protect his clients' interests and wanted to establish his own PMC—after he had shut down EO. In his 33-page diatribe, Cleary stated that Shearer (1998) offered a useful thumbnail sketch of EO's activities in 1994:

In January 1994, the FAA's 16 Regiment was airlifted to N'dalatando, a key town south-east of Luanda, and retook it with tactical assistance from EO. The Cafunfu diamond fields in Luanda [sic] Norte province were captured in June 1994 in an operation in which EO personnel participated directly. In August the FAA regained Soyo and took

the provincial capital of Uige and, in September, the key town of Huambo fell to government forces.

A map of Angola was included with the heading, 'The following map, reflecting the situation in February 1995, illustrates, by comparison with that of September 1993, the FAA's successes with EO's help'. Cleary went on to comment, 'It is arguable, therefore, that the effect of the heightened capability afforded to the FAA was not to shorten, but to prolong the war'.

Cleary disingenuously argued that Executive Outcomes' role in Angola had prolonged the war—a war that had festered and flared for decades and in which Cleary and his numerous friends and associates (including those in the UN) had been content to act as Savimbi's advisors, friends, and supporters—as long as they got what they wanted and benefited financially. Paradoxically, the government had actually started winning the war against UNITA, and very rapidly so, when EO got involved.

Cleary further wrote: 'On 11 August 1993, before it was known that the government was negotiating with EO,[440] Savimbi proposed a cease-fire in a radio broadcast from Huambo. The proposal was rejected by Luanda'.

While claiming that UNITA had made overtures for peace in August 1993 while the MPLA government continued to prepare for war, Cleary conveniently forgot that it was UNITA that had gone back to war after having rejected the election results in 1992. He also took pains to point out that UNITA was the party actually attempting to achieve a cease-fire. Perhaps Cleary had seen the writing on the wall and advised UNITA to do this. It would have been very easy for UNITA to offer this apparent olive-branch while they controlled the largest part of the country (having been fully supported by their numerous allies—including South Africa). It was also self-evident that Savimbi would have assumed he could control the outcome of such an overture since he was negotiating from a position of strength. He was soon to realise that he had over-estimated his own forces and over-relied on poor advice. This would cost both him and UNITA dearly.

No government will willingly abdicate and surrender to an anti-government force or terrorist movement, particularly not one that is intent on destroying infrastructure and murdering people who do not support it. Cleary's assertion about UNITA having been 'unaware' of the MPLA's contract with EO was yet another of his misleading statements; the involvement of EO had by then been made well known to UNITA by the South African media, the DFA, MI, and Cleary himself.

The FAA, on learning about UNITA's call for a cease-fire, believed that it was precisely because of the contract with EO that they wished to negotiate, having noted the great human cost of their confrontation with EO's men at Soyo.

Other journalists-cum-ISS staffers such as Karin Annette Pech a.k.a. Khareen Pech were also keen to make their mark as 'experts' on Executive Outcomes, and they published their own amalgamations of disinformation, perceptions, very few facts, and many lies. These mistruths were given credence by other journalists such as De Wet Potgieter, Stefan Laufer, Peta Thornycroft, and others. They allowed the agendas of their

paymasters and their own self-importance to override due diligence or validation of their reports. They even fabricated claims.

EO's company structure was described as a 'web of companies', insinuating once more that EO's activities were sinister and all-pervasive. Numerous companies in South Africa, and of course elsewhere, have business links to other companies and many corporations consist of a host of different companies operating in various parts of the world under different names. But as far as Pech was concerned, standard business practice was 'sinister' when it came to EO.

In fairness, not everyone followed the deceitful examples set by Pech, the ISS, and the other idiots in the media. There were also many objective yet critical articles on Executive Outcomes. These articles were never given any prominence as they clashed with the prevailing narrative surrounding Executive Outcomes.

In Conflict Trends of June 2000, Doug Brooks, in his article, 'Write a cheque, end a war using private military companies (PMCs) to end African conflicts', wrote the following:

PMCs have proved their ability to end wars. The much maligned South African PMC, Executive Outcomes (EO), actually brought two African wars to an end, and they did it cheaper and faster than would have been possible using multinational organisations. In Sierra Leone, ECOMOG (the Cease-Fire Monitoring Group of ECOWAS) spent hundreds of millions of dollars over several years, losing a war that EO had won in ten months for only $35 million. Before that, in Angola, the UN spent $1.5 billion in its failed attempt to solidify a peace under the Lusaka Protocol that EO had created in a year's fighting, for only $80 million. In both cases, the PMC had done the hard combat, but the subsequent peace was lost because the international organisations were unable to provide the effective post-conflict security necessary to establish a long- term settlement. In both cases, EO (or another PMC) could easily have continued to provide the necessary security that would have permanently ended those wars.

The British Army Review published an article on Executive Outcomes by Mariyam Hasham in their summer issue of 2003. Although it contained several errors, the article was at least balanced:

Executive Outcomes (EO) closed its offices in Pretoria in January 1999. EO had been and remains over four years after its closure, South Africa's best-known private military company (PMC). In 2002 the UK Green Paper hinted that PMCs might be a cost effective supplement to peacekeeping operations. The debate that followed revealed just how contentious the whole question of PMCs is. What it also inadvertently revealed is how many stereotypes, misconceptions, and outright fantasies colour the perception of PMCs. The very mention of EO draws the attention of journalists and commentators, evoking preconceptions about mercenaries and the South African military tradition. Yet, for almost a decade, it was these South African soldiers who challenged the stereotypes about mercenaries. They have been at the centre of the debate ever since.

Hasham further stated:

Much of the commentary on EO has been dominated by the alleged links between oil, diamonds, and EO's contractual complexity. What remains little understood is what kind of military instrument EO was. As a company, EO was rapidly deployable, cohesive, and responsive to the high-risk environments it worked in. It faced challenges no conventional military unit would ever have had to deal with. Its comparative advantage was a unique organisational capability that allowed the company to master the risks of hostile environments, and to do so without the supportive functions provided by nation-states. Analysis of PMCs as 'dogs of war' whose presence signals arms trafficking, human rights violations, and violence may be a comforting fiction in the current security climate, but it is not an accurate one. Professional PMCs, like EO, are tied to stability—either from the initial contract level or as the final product to their client. As existing peacekeeping models are redefined to reflect changes to the security landscape, companies like EO offer insights into different ways of working in complex environments. Just how EO set about mastering the shifting tectonics of war zones is the most interesting thing about the company.

The lessons drawn from the Angolan experience were put to good use in 1995, after EO had been contacted by Sierra Leone's beleaguered government. A four- year battle between Valentine Strasser's government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had devastated the country and left its economy in ruins. In May 1995 EO initially deployed 150 personnel to train and support the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF). Its adaptability in the unknown environment of West Africa revealed how rapidly it could deploy and set up working operations. Unlike in Angola, EO personnel did not have previous on the ground experience in Sierra Leone to draw on. EO's control of intelligence and its political neutrality proved to be important assets for the company. The company's detailed intelligence picture highlighted divisive elements within the RSLMF. These included RSLMF officers who were concerned that EO's unyielding discipline would disrupt lucrative deals with local mining companies. EO planners identified those sections of the RSMLF who would respond to training, using the same model that had been so successful in Angola. In addition, they built up an intelligence network among local hunters, the Kamajors, drawing on the latter's tracking skills for assistance. The logistics in Sierra Leone were more problematic. Force projection and manoeuvre warfare depend on high-speed momentum which places a great deal of pressure on the logistics supply chain. This is compounded by conditions where there are no stockpiles of weapons close to the site and no predictable direction of attack. To counteract this, EO rapidly set up an air-bridge linking both ends of the continent to ferry in personnel and equipment.

The newly retrained SLDF forces, with EO alongside them, pushed the RUF away from Freetown, opened the roads into the city to food and fuel transport and moved to protect the strategically important city and diamond fields of Kono. The anti-RUF coalition, shaped and directed by EO, tipped the balance of power and a ceasefire was declared. In November 1996, the Abidjan Peace Accords set out conditions for democratic elections, one of which was the confinement of EO personnel to barracks followed by the

withdrawal of all foreign forces. EO left the country at the end of January 1997 having completed its mission after only 21 months.

Those who were opposed to peace and stability in Angola under the MPLA, and in Sierra Leone under the NPRC government, would continue attacking the company.

They would also attack those who viewed Executive Outcomes' role objectively. It was never difficult to see who was on which side of the fence—or why.

In early 2005 I was given the last fourteen pages of a report on an in-depth investigation (by either an intelligence service or a law-enforcement agency) into Executive Outcomes' 'sinister deeds'. Although I remain unaware of who produced this undated document, it laid to rest many of the lies, allegations, and claims concerning the company.

The report stated that a 'special team' investigating EO had followed up information given to them in detail, only to discover that it was 'complete disinformation, deliberately fed to us to put EO in a sinister and criminal light'.

Page 16, paragraph 5 (headed, 'the role players') reads:

5.1 Executive Outcomes

There is a saying that the tallest tree catches most of the wind.

It seems to be true of Executive Outcomes. They were implicated by the original information from... sources, and thereafter their name and/or associated companies names, were linked numerously to illegal and sinister activities in reports to the Investigating Team. Allegations included amongst others organising clandestine arms transactions; supporting rebel groups; staging front companies for British MI6: illegal transportation of arms by road and air; plotting assassinations, etc. etc.

These allegations and rumours were always made without any verification and/ or substance...

In South Africa reports suggest an associated company of EO provided cover for the so-called McNealy, and another associated security company, Saracen, obtaining the arms.

A significant amount of time went into investigating these allegations, but no evidence thereof could be found.

The rumours are not new to EO. Previously their men were accused of smuggling anything from arms to diamonds between South Africa and Angola on flights of their airfreight company IBIS Air. The rumours became so insistent that EO had stopped usage of Lanseria airport with limited security and customs facilities, in favour of Johannesburg International. They invited the SAPS to check every flight and asked them to arrest anyone they could find being involved in such irregularities.

Rumours that containers once were shipped from Walvis Bay to Angola for EO, containing poison disguised as food, were found to be totally untrue. They had never shipped any containers from Walvis Bay.

Rumours about Saracen Security smuggling arms out of South Africa were found to be totally distorted, as Saracen, also contracted to do legitimate security work in different countries, legally bought a small quantity of small arms for security guards. This was paid

for by an EO cheque. The transaction complied with all the necessary prescribed procedures, documentation, and permits.

Although it cannot be proved, we strongly believe that a lot of allegations and disinformation regarding activities of EO, originated from certain members of military intelligence. We can only speculate on the reasons for this secretive agenda.

The Investigating Team also found that Executive Outcomes deals only with legitimate Governments, involving substantial rewards. According to our assessment EO will therefore never risk its name by involving itself with doubtful arms deals. They do not need it, not financially, not strategically, and not politically.

I showed the document to a journalist and asked why it had not been published in the media. I was informed, as I had been so many times before, that it wasn't newsworthy or in the public's interest. Apparently, anything that did not match the media's false and misleading narrative of the issue was not newsworthy. Truth was of no interest to them. I also suspected that if they made it known that they had misled the public and been duped by DFA, MI, and Cleary, they may have found their jobs at risk.

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In June 2007, a senior UN advisor who had served within that organisation while we were still active, told me how the UN had viewed EO:

Mention was frequently made of EO in some investigative or inquiry commissions and panels established by the Security Council which was basically mandated to inquire into certain matters. Senior UN officials would, without directly saying it, cleverly word their briefings in such a way that it was alluded that EO was the cause of many of the problems in Africa and also engaged in criminal activities. It was clear that their minds were already made up before the inquiries had even started. An example is the UN International Commission of Inquiry for Rwanda which was established in 1995 to investigate reports of illegal trafficking of weapons and military training in the Rwandan refugee camps established in eastern DRC after the genocide.

Even though that inquiry did not lay the blame at EO's door, others did. Of course, once such nonsense has been published in a UN report, it becomes 'historical fact' and can never be erased. In fact, it is forever available to whoever wants access to it.

A number of unconfirmed and unsubstantiated reports, mainly from the media or NGOs, but also from some ambassadors, were conveyed to us alleging EO's involvement in such activities. None of these claims could ever be proved, and when we investigated them, we found them to be simply allegations based on disinformation.

In 1995, at a UN briefing, many very senior UN officials again conveyed all kinds of rumours, wild claims, and allegations directed towards you and EO. When asked to provide some evidence or link, they always failed to do so. There was very obviously a policy of demonising Executive Outcomes and, I am convinced, this was part of a very well-considered strategy.

This strategy did not work with all UN advisors, because, one or two of us took a strong stand and refused to fall into their trap. However, others obliged. There was a pattern of trying to deflect blame and criticism away from individuals and organisations which some high-ups and important powers wanted to protect and the best way to do that was to find scapegoats! You made an excellent target as you had shown them up to be incompetent. Of course, there are also always people in the UN who are there purely to further the agendas of certain powers. We also noticed a similar strategy and pattern emerge in South Africa in 1994–96. Officials from your DFA and Military Intelligence were very keen to make sure that you and EO were put in a negative light. Of course, we realised that they were mostly trying to cover up something which some of us thought might implicate them. Throughout our intensive investigations over the next one year, i.e. 1995–6, we did not come across any concrete information or evidence which would implicate EO in any of the allegations levelled against you. This upset several highly placed UN officials who, for reasons of their own knowing, desperately wanted to negate any positive image EO may have had.

I was finally getting closer to the truth, but, hidden as it was beneath layers of secrecy and deception, the full extent of the UN's role in (and its reason for) the vilification of EO would most probably never be known. I can only assume that, as I was told, Cleary and his friends in DFA were advising them how to write their reports, and we had shown how ineffectual they were by comparison. If they could not at least appear effective, their funding would dry up. The balance was not to be disturbed.

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An Angolan diplomat, in a letter of reference to another African government, wrote in 2007:

He came to prominence in Angola in 1993 when he was contacted by the General Staff of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) as a strategic and tactical consultant. At that time, his duties entailed the restructuring and retraining of the FAA/ Special Unit.

…His highly valued input into the Angolan National Defence Strategy…paved the way for new military thinking in Angola. …he was able to penetrate the rebel movement (UNITA) with agents and, using the intelligence gained, predict their planned actions, something the FAA were then able to counter….(he) played an important role in forcing the rebels to seek a negotiated peace settlement.

A Principle Advisor to the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, wrote in 2007:

Executive Outcomes, the organisation he (Eeben Barlow) founded and led so successfully was the very embodiment of a super-efficient and highly effective outfit, which had to its credit some remarkable achievements on the African continent. Had it not

been unfairly maligned and targeted by vested interests it would have continued to render very useful service for a long time to come.

Initially, the media, the DFA, MI, Cleary, the ISS, and their many associates, refused to acknowledge the fact that they were being duplicitous. Instead, they spun their lies even faster, continually claiming to have new information on the company. It was only after the initial publication of this book in 2007 that Brendon Seery, a journalist for The Star,[441] submitted a lengthy interview he'd had with me.

Seery commented in his almost page-length review (much of which can be construed as an apology) as follows:

Interviewing Eeben Barlow is not an experience you would describe as comfortable. It's not because he is a former CCB operative nor the fact that he is proficient in multiple ways of killing and maiming. It's because what he says not only makes a lot of sense, but it also makes you somewhat ashamed of both yourself and your profession: journalism.

He doesn't like most journalists, whom he accuses of having helped his enemies wage a vicious disinformation war against him and his company, Executive Outcomes, for many years.

"All that shit you wrote, all the garbage you passed on from the so-called 'sources'—where was even the slightest bit of evidence to back it up?"

In his newly-published book—Executive Outcomes, Against All Odds—Barlow savages many local and international journalists who, he says, willingly did 'hatchet jobs' on EO.

And I am one of them. Back in 1993, my byline was one of three which appeared on a piece quoting former SA Defence Force Colonel Jan Breytenbach as saying EO was 'training ANC hit squads' in Angola. (At the time, EO had been given a contract by the Angolan government to re-train the army—a project which effectively spelled the beginning of the end of Jonas Savimbi and his Unita movement, as the Angolan forces were better trained and prepared for battle.) The alleged ANC squads had a hit list of prominent people, including himself, claimed Breytenbach. …

Did we ever try to get corroboration or confirmation of Breytenbach's claims? No. Why would we? We all firmly believed Barlow and his bunch of ex-SADF "mercenaries" could only have been up to no good in Angola. After all, why would they help the people who were once their enemies, unless they were being paid huge amounts and were involved in oil or diamond deals? Barlow sits across from me in a Pretoria coffee shop, his blue eyes accusing. I have no answers. He has a point.

In conversation, Barlow echoes the litany of accusations and claims which were levelled against EO in the eight or so years it operated as a private military company in Africa and elsewhere: they committed atrocities; they were given huge diamond and oil concessions; they were a front for Britain's MI5 secret service; they fronted for the American CIA; they were incompetent buffoons. "Take the case of Sierre Leone (where EO helped the Freetown government crush RUF rebels): we were accused of committing

atrocities against the local people. No proof. Nobody ever charged. No witnesses. The opposite was the case.

"As we went into action against the rebels in a new country and environment, we realised that we needed intelligence and information. And we got that from the local people, who realised that we were bringing stability and security after years of rape and murder by the rebels.

"We gave them some medical help and we made it safe for them to go back to their normal lives. They helped us with the information we needed to mount our operations. Think about it if we had been slaughtering them, would they have helped us?"

Barlow is correct. Neither the United Nations, whose peacekeeping troops replaced EO and who then virtually lost the country back to the rebels; nor the Sierra Leone government, has made any atrocity charges against the company. "A professional journalist," Barlow says…, "visited the country and wrote that the people were happy with our presence and what we achieved."

Angola, likewise, was an area where EO was repeatedly under fire, mainly from journalists in South Africa.

"You people," he says, "ignored everything we provided you in terms of intelligence about who was really benefitting from the continuation of the war with UNITA.

"There are people who have a lot of blood on their hands—by prolonging the Angolan civil war, tens of thousands of people died.

This interview foreshadowed the things several other journalists would say to me over the coming years, yet, not one of them had the courage or the integrity to rectify their wrongdoings in the media, where they had proclaimed their lies.

James Mitchell of The Star, on publication of the first imprint of this book, wrote:

Overall, this is an extremely important contribution to our understanding of recent political and military history, both here and throughout Africa. It would be a great pity if, because of the many cans of worms it exposes, it was ignored.

Vindication came from two journalists, an in-depth investigation into EO by an investigative team, a UN official who was suitably placed to comment on the developing narrative at that organisation's meetings, and the magazines, Conflict Trends, British Army Review, and Harper's Magazine.

When Assistant Professor Chris Blattman attacked me, EO's work in Sierra Leone, and STTEP,[442] on his blog,[443] a Sierra Leonean citizen, Kambale Mawa, responded as follows:

You sir, have no idea what you are talking about.

For goodness sake, you held one 'job'. Just one at Deloitte & Touche and you could not hold on to even that one. You have as much life experience as a potatoe. You have seen nothing of the world but HBO and MTV, and heard of your cohort's accolade.

You sir killed my family. You came and cut my father's hands off, smashed his foot with a truck, and laughed about it. Then while we were tied to posts my sisters and mother

was raped repeated till they bled to death. Then they were burned alive. You did that sir. I was there and watched you do it. Maybe you had a different face, and skin color—but might as well have been you. It was your and your buddies' words that let the beasts loose. You think you know better.

I will never forget those years I spent in slavery because of you and your ilk. Every day I wake up and do not look into the mirror. I scare little children on the street. You did that to me.

When EO was here, we were safe. They came through; they were real 'gentlemen'. You sir, do not have the right to even mention their names without prostrating. Narcissism is an illness. You should have that looked at as it spreads.

The voices of people like Kambale Mawa were shut out of any narrative that reflected positively on EO, but with the introduction of social media platforms, voices such as his can no longer be silenced. So too, several others are writing about how those who opposed peace and stability maligned EO.

Vindication is indeed sweet but it has only sugar-coated the anger and bitterness I still feel towards those who seek to make their living by lying to protect illegal government actions, and who wish to promote conflict above all.

Journalist Brendan Seery came closest to apologising for the media's deceptive reporting on EO in a lengthy interview (Photo The Citizen)

US Prof Chris Blattman was taken to task by a Sierra Leonean citizen for criticising EO's role in that country (Photo chrisblattman.com)

48:
Betrayal, Closure and Aftermath

Companies such as Executive Outcomes—and the other PMCs that followed in our tracks—would never have become necessary had serving governments, the international community, the UN—and now the AU—taken decisive action in so-called trouble spots or flash points. Incompetent and compliant Third World governments that are easily manipulable and misled, particularly by Western governments looking to expand and entrench foreign interests, have, coupled with massive intelligence failures, plunged several African countries into ongoing conflict. The UN blue- helmeted peacekeeping forces have proved themselves incapable of securing peace, time and time again. Most of their troops come from third-world countries and lack the training, discipline, leadership, and determination to have any chance of success. The lack of mission-preparation and basic soldiering skills is exacerbated by an absolute lack of strategic thinking and the absence of a common doctrine that is further impaired by a distinct lack of political and military will on the part of the UN. I have also personally had good reason to question their dedication to the task at hand— UN troops operating in close proximity to EO bases frequently asked permission to seek protection in our training camps if they came under fire. Others, such as those in the DRC, have started their own mining operations. Small wonder they are not trusted by the local inhabitants and notorious for scuttling away when things get hot.

Where UN commanders on the ground are keen to make a difference, they are invariably hog-tied by bureaucracy and international politics. Several of them have either expressed their disquiet or left in disgust.

The case of Canadian General Dallaire,[444] who pleaded with the Secretary-General to be allowed to intervene in the imminent Rwandan genocide remains a classic example of UN impotence in action. Permission was refused. There is no doubt that timely action would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. One has to question the purpose of the UN deployment in light of their choice to stand by idly and watch while a horrified commander was prevented from doing his duty. Other UN deployments, in the DRC, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Central African Republic, have followed similar trends .

The so-called Blue Helmets are regarded with suspicion, distrust, and even scorn by the average citizen in many African countries. Several African governments believe the UN plays both sides of the fence, attempting to secure peace in the public eye while trying to protect certain economic interests behind the scenes. I am in total agreement with them.

Africa can boast numerous examples of poorly planned and uncoordinated UN operations, conducted while the UN stood by, often in full view of television cameras, as thousands of innocent and helpless people were slaughtered or made homeless. But as these flash-points were in Africa—and possessed no strategic resources of importance—the international community simply talked a lot and turned a blind eye. Had they been in

Europe, I suspect the UN and the international community would have acted very differently.

More recently, Associated Press reported[445] that UN contractors were being bribed to assist Muslim civilians fleeing from conflict:

Surrounded by hostile Christian militias, Muslim civilians in the volatile Central African Republic town of Bangassou have paid small fortunes to United Nations contractors to hide them in vehicles and take them to safety after UN peacekeepers repeatedly refused to do so, according to multiple people who made the journey. Some paid $100 each to lie under the tarp of a truck escorted by armed UN peacekeepers for the 700km journey over unpaved roads through dangerous countryside held by armed groups.

Others paid off contracted pilots to be flown to safety aboard planes that had brought food and material to UN troops, according to one Bangassou resident who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was concerned for his safety… It appears the UN was aware of the practice as early as mid-August, according to an internal document obtained by The Associated Press. The document acknowledged that on one journey, rebels 'targeted the ECOLOG truck transporting Muslim civilians travelling in the convoy'.

UN authorities, though, have decided not to evacuate the Muslims from Bangassou after 'clear opposition' from senior government leaders, including President Faustin Touadera, according to a person familiar with the discussions who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

A government spokesperson did not respond to repeated requests for comment. When asked whether they had received any requests to evacuate civilians, MINUSCA officials declined to answer.

While the UN vows to crack down on civilians fleeing aboard its convoys, the bishop says desperation is growing and he expects the ECOLOG drivers will continue to transport people out of the city.

Where the Western powers have politico-economic interests at stake—and particularly, when these are related to strategic resources[446]—intervention is likely to be swift and decisive. We need look no further than Afghanistan and, later Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The sudden transition of the GWOT to the sparsely inhabited Taoudeni Basin in the Sahel further illustrates this. ISIS and its affiliates are often cited as the reason for intervention.

After Executive Outcomes had blazed the path for military consultancy and advisory work (or established what others referred to as 'private military companies') a number of newly established and similar companies realised that the military market was an open playing field. Personnel were not difficult to recruit (out-of- work professional soldiers are always available).

Within South Africa, many of these out-of-work soldiers (and former anti- government men) have now taken advantage of crumbling safety and security structures and turned to crime.

The governments of a number of First World countries have used self-backed and funded PMCs to gain a foothold and expand their influence in countries with exploitable natural resources. This approach also allows them to adopt a policy of plausible deniability. The PMCs that followed in our footsteps often used the same approach that Executive Outcomes used in Angola and Sierra Leone as their template and several (such as Sandline International) tried to forge business alliances with us. Others colluded with the media, promoting the misconception that we and they were actually one and the same company. Many others simply failed—and continue to do so.

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Executive Outcomes' name and reputation became an important key with which to unlock contracts. Some companies apparently even posed as 'Executive Outcomes' while they were negotiating with African governments and then signed final agreements under their own company names.

During the period 1993 to 1997, at the height of the disinformation campaign targeting EO, we suspected there might be several other companies working as 'Executive Outcomes' and using our name to further their own aims and agendas.

I exposed one of these phonies on 'Good Morning South Africa',[447] in 1995. Operating out of Voortrekker Hoogte,[448] the company had been established by members of the intelligence community, and was being run by 'Stolla' Stoltz , an ex-32 Battalion member. Its aim was to wave the recruitment flag at serving SANDF members and thereby identify members who were considering joining the real EO. Such members would then be considered 'disloyal' to the SANDF and their careers would abruptly be terminated or suddenly hit a ceiling.

After I had exposed them on television, Stoltz telephoned me and claimed that 'they' were merely trying to assist me by identifying good men for future use in Executive Outcomes. But, he added threateningly, I had just exposed a sensitive SANDF project. This explanation was so flimsy that I could only smile at their bumbling.

A website (purportedly run from Puerto Rico) under the aegis of 'El Viking',[449] was another example of blatant misrepresentation. This group tapped into the international web of disinformation to imply that they were Executive Outcomes' overall holding company, and that they offered 'international dynamic solutions'. The company also referred to itself as the 'Viking Group' and was apparently run by Riaan Stander[450] of the National Intelligence Agency.

A UK-based group also established a website and claimed to be the 'real' Executive Outcomes. An internet search for 'executiveoutcomes.com' automatically redirected to 'Northbridge Services Group', of which Pasquale John DiPofi claimed to be the CEO. The 'Administrative Contact' was listed as Robert Kovacic[451] of Abbots Court, Tewkesbury, UK. They had established a fake 'Executive Outcomes' company based in Mount Clemens, USA.

After news reports about the World Bank having refused to loan Sierra Leone the money to honour its debt to the real Executive Outcomes, Northbridge launched a legal action against the government of Sierra Leone in an attempt to pilfer the funds. Northbridge's CEO, DiPofi's attempted fraudulent action was reported as follows:[452]

Federal prosecutors say Pasquale John DiPofi, described in court proceedings as a security contractor, mercenary, and bodyguard for entertainers—threatened a French businessman who was trying to collect a $23 million debt the government of Sierra Leone owed to a company that provided military assistance during the country's civil war in the 1990s.

DiPofi was arrested at Detroit Metro Airport on Sept. 4 after returning from a two and a half month trip to Iraq.

According to the criminal complaint, Executive Outcomes, a private military company in South Africa, contracted with the government of Sierra Leone in 1995–97 to provide military equipment, security, and training during the African nation's civil war. The company was to receive $30 million.

DiPofi, a married father of two, was president of the US arm of the now-defunct company.[453] He also is a director of Northbridge Services Group Ltd., a British- based private military company.

When the government of Sierra Leone failed to pay Executive Outcomes, the complaint said, the company asked a sister firm, Executive Outcomes of Panama,[454] to collect the debt. It hired Michael Grunberg of Paris to try to negotiate with Sierra Leone.

In January 2001, Executive Outcomes sued the government in a Sierra Leone court. Although both sides agreed to settle the dispute for $23 million, the government didn't pay. Later, the Sierra Leone government produced documents from Executive Outcomes of Mt. Clemens and its president, DiPofi, which said he was the person to whom the debt was owed.

I am unaware of the government of Sierra Leone ever having honoured its debt to EO. If it did, I was certainly never informed of it, and I never received a cent from them.

I later learnt that DiPofi had received a short prison sentence for company identity theft, conspiracy, wire fraud, and several other charges. In addition, he was ordered to refund a large sum of money to an unspecified member (or members) of the real Executive Outcomes. Unsurprisingly, I was also not made aware of this until 2017. Equally unsurprisingly, I also learnt that this repayment had gone into someone else's pocket.

Another company calling itself 'Executive Outcomes' was created in Mexico. This company implied that they were continuing the work of their 'late founder, Eeben Barlow'. A feeble apology was offered when I confronted them.

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Probably the most despicable act of fraud was one that occurred within Executive Outcomes itself when a senior member negotiated and signed a contract with the

government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on EO's behalf, and then passed it to another company. The DRC government believed they were dealing with the legitimate Executive Outcomes and that EO was coming to assist them. Men who were still under contract elsewhere (and being paid for by a different government) were then silently redeployed to the DRC, having been told they were still working for the contracting government. Naturally they never questioned their redeployment.

The contracting government and the DRC government were both unaware of this deception, and the proceeds of the contract went into the bank accounts of this senior member and his cohorts.

Most distasteful to me was the fact that this member and his cronies would never have amounted to anything outside of EO, but they chose to betray the company that had given them an opportunity, the government they were contracted to, and the men in EO. I was oblivious to the circumstances at the time and defended EO's name to the extent of calling certain journalists liars for having stated that we were in the DRC.

Karma works in strange ways. This deceptive element within EO attempted to enter into litigation with the Democratic Republic of Congo when that government reneged on payment after discovering their deception. They failed.

I would also, many years later, learn that some of EO's senior members and directors had set up 'gatekeepers' to prevent governments and the men of EO from talking to me. EO men who took concerns to these gatekeepers were promptly ignored, and government contracts were funnelled out of EO and given to another party or parties. The profits would vanish into the pockets of those executing the deception.

I was horrified, especially as I later learnt that several such cases existed.

Slowly but surely, greedy and deceptive directors and senior members of Executive Outcomes achieved what the intelligence services, private business entities, the media, and even some foreign governments had not been able to: they destroyed the company from within.

Having already left the company, I watched in silent despair and sadness from the sidelines as the men who had been given such an opportunity, systematically destroyed what I considered to be a highly professional and successful military advisory and training company by cutting costs and corners to fatten profits. Their bank balances were more important to them than the men who had sacrificed so much to make the company successful.

Executive Outcomes did not close its doors on 31 December 1998 because of the South African government's newly enacted 'anti-mercenary' legislation, (as was so widely—and again falsely—proclaimed in the press) but because of a difference in opinion amongst those to whom I had given the company. In reality, Executive Outcomes had a government-issued licence to continue its work—something the media refused (and still refuses) to acknowledge. The media also refused to acknowledge that EO had made substantial contributions to the formulation of the act at the government's request.

I had left the company in a healthy financial position with several potential African government contracts pending. Two of these contracts were never finalised. Several of EO's senior officers later asked me to renegotiate and secure the contracts for them;

apparently the client governments had decided they were not interested in dealing with the company if I was no longer involved. I declined.

Deceit, greed, and power can wreak havoc in any organisation, as these men were to discover. Their government clients were not blind to what had now become EO's 'new way' of operating either. This created considerable damage to EO's reputation.

Executive Outcomes had finally destroyed itself.

In late December of 1998, The Citizen reported Executive Outcomes' pending closure as follows: South African company Executive Outcomes, described by some as a mercenary outfit, is closing its doors as from January.

Shareholders and directors of Executive Outcomes resolved to terminate the activities of the company and to wind up its affairs from January 1.

Executive Outcomes director Nico Palm said the company, which was set up mainly to provide military help in the resolution of violent conflicts in Africa, no longer had a role to play in this regard.

The company said it looked back with pride on what it described as its successful contribution towards African peace processes, specifically Angola and Sierra Leone.

The company and the men who really served Executive Outcomes can indeed look back with great pride at what they achieved against incredible odds.

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Several companies outside of South Africa have also attempted to emulate what EO did with the approval and financial backing of governments that have come to realise the value of PMCs. Used as instruments of foreign power and policy projection, most of these companies are tasked to secure and protect foreign interests for their host-governments. South Africa sadly did not have that foresight. Instead, it became the victim of disinformation from its own intelligence services.

As Africa can testify, success, for the large majority of these companies, remains elusive. But lack of success justifies prolonged employment as they continue to 'protect' the interests of their foreign sponsors.

Companies such as MPRI, DSL, Blackwater Security,[455] KMS, and several others are today operating in conflict areas around the world where they are defined as 'civilian contractors' in support of national armies.

In Iraq today, there are several such US, UK, French, and South African PMCs operating as 'security companies'. The South African companies, fortunately, are not subjected to the daily assaults that we had to endure from the local and international media.

In late 1999, a representative of a European government contacted me and asked if I would be willing, either to resurrect Executive Outcomes or be enticed into supporting foreign governments in Africa. He was hoping EO would be able to conduct numerous deniable operations on behalf of his government in Africa. The big money carrot was dangled. I declined.

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In the early 2000s, new rumours to the effect that Executive Outcomes was still operating, started surfacing. As the rumours inevitably gathered momentum, it was claimed that Executive Outcomes had become involved in the Ivory Coast. Unlike the rumour mongers in the media, I knew that EO had long since closed its doors. They had obviously been unable to comprehend the press release that proclaimed EO's demise—or needed someone to point a finger at and simply refused to believe it. The rumours persisted and eventually Nico Palm, the sole remaining director and custodian of Executive Outcomes, issued the following press release on 31 October 2002:

Of late, there has been a lot of media speculation that Executive Outcomes has become involved in activities outside of South Africa, especially in the Ivory Coast.

The company Executive Outcomes closed its doors for business on 31 December 1998 and has subsequently ceased to operate. Neither the ex-chairman nor myself (who incidentally is the only shareholder!) has activated the company or given permission for Executive Outcomes to be used as a vehicle for any activities. The name of Executive Outcomes is therefore being used in a totally fraudulent manner.

It has also come to my attention that a Japanese television crew are currently in Angola filming the activities of 'Executive Outcomes'. In addition, this fraudulent grouping of people have reactivated a website (www.executiveoutcomes.com) without any permission being granted for the use of the name or the logo of the true Executive Outcomes.

This information plus other activities relating to Executive Outcomes has on numerous occasions been discussed with the South African Secret Service which is fully aware of the true circumstances surrounding this impostor company. Any South African citizens who are approached by people claiming to represent 'Executive Outcomes' are to take note of the fact that Executive Outcomes is currently not active and therefore not recruiting any persons for any tasks. As such, Executive Outcomes cannot be held liable for any promises or employment contracts undertaken in its name.

Over the years that followed, rumours about Executive Outcomes still being operational were kept alive by the media, academia, and rapidly developing scores of internet journalists and 'experts'. There were literally hundreds of articles written about Executive Outcomes, several of which regurgitated disinformation, and many of which were fabricated. Others were just attempts by journalists to justify their positions and earn their salaries. The stories, however, had neither fact nor substance to them—as the newly reformed South African intelligence services and SAPS have realised at great cost to the taxpayer.

Sometime in June 2002, I received a telephone call from someone claiming to have heard that Executive Outcomes was being resurrected, and wanting to know if there was a position for him in the company. He had understood that EO was planning a coup d'état 'somewhere in Africa'. I warned him that he was being misled, and that EO had never

attempted to unseat any government despite media claims to the contrary, but the rumour slowly gathered momentum through the grapevine— and I became increasingly alarmed.

In November 2002, the rumours began to develop substance: 'Executive Outcomes' was apparently planning to overthrow the government of Zimbabwe and another undisclosed African government. I knew from experience that if the rumour was not quashed, the finger of accusation would be directed at me and I would become the victim of another false-intelligence driven law enforcement raid on my home, and the accompanying frustration.

I urged Nico Palm to immediately issue a press release to distance EO from any such activities, hoping that this would also serve as a subtle warning to any ex-EO members who were being given false hope about EO's purported revival. He did:

Several 'new' Executive Outcomes companies have sprung up since the company closed. All are fake but several still use the company's logo

An urgent appeal is being made to mainly African governments and their representatives in South Africa to go to the police with information about bogus companies that fraudulently obtain multi-million rand contracts by posing as the military advisory company Executive Outcomes that closed its doors in 1998. Despite ongoing allegations that Executive Outcomes was shut down due to South African government legislation, we hereby wish to inform the public that Executive Outcomes complied with the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill. Executive Outcomes actively took part in structuring the legislation in tendering foreign military assistance.

From the outset, Executive Outcomes welcomed the Bill as well as cooperated with the South African government in this regard. Executive Outcomes applied for a permit to render its services and Permit Number 6-97-00006 dated 24 October 1997 was issued and signed by the Secretary for Defence. This permit is still valid.

Almost a year later, the same story resurfaced.

I received a disturbing telephone call from somebody who identified himself as 'Gerrit'. He had heard we were recruiting for a coup in Africa, apparently with the South African government's blessing and support, and was interested in joining the company as he was

unemployed and needed to earn money to care for his family. I warned him (and told him to warn his colleagues—especially if they were ex- EO members) to stay away from such ventures as Executive Outcomes no longer existed, and that if it did, it would not be working to unseat African governments. He continued to plead with me, even offering to come to our 'offices in Johannesburg' to discuss his lengthy curriculum vitae. As EO had never had offices in Johannesburg, I suspected the company name was being used to create an intelligence sting—and that the implied SA government involvement was merely a carrot being used to make the entire story credible.

Thinking that I was being targeted for a sting operation, I let the matter lie. It later occurred to me that (given the number of people and organisations claiming to be Executive Outcomes) something needed to be done to protect the real company and those who had served in it.

I again asked Nico Palm to contact the SASS, the NIA, and the SAPS, and inform them of the rumour doing the rounds. I was also worried that the media might pick up on it and make capital out of it as usual. Being aware of the South African government's pro-Mugabe stance and policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe, I wanted EO's name and ex-EO members protected from any such nefarious claims.

In 2002, rumours that a resurrected EO was planning to oust President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe began doing the rounds (photo: Daily Maverick)

Together we penned a press release which Nico would issue if EO again became the target of false accusations in the media. I wanted to take every possible step to prevent anyone from using the name 'Executive Outcomes' for illegitimate purposes. We also contacted several ex-EO employees by phone and advised them to decline any overtures made to them by a company claiming to be Executive Outcomes.

The rumours about EO planning to oust Mugabe and his government eventually died down.[456]

In late 2003, a new story emerged. This time, EO was said to be planning a coup somewhere in West Africa. We were also made aware that Simon Mann had opened an office in Sandton, Johannesburg and that it was being referred to as 'Executive Outcomes'.

My concern grew rapidly and I again asked Nico to contact the SASS and inform them of what we were hearing. Both SASS and NIA were, however, well aware of the developing situation. I breathed a sigh of relief when I was told that the intelligence services were, furthermore, aware of the fact that EO was not involved.[457]

Recruitment for the operation had apparently begun sometime in late December 2003 or early January 2004. I received several telephone calls from people who asked whether I could offer them a part in the 'job' as they had heard I was recruiting people for a 'special mission' to launch a coup d'état in Equatorial Guinea. The buzz over the grapevine was that a subsequent coup d'état would, simultaneously, be mounted in the DRC. A tip-off resulted in the planned coup attempt in the DRC being quashed on 28 /29 March 2004.

According to rumours in late 2003/2004, EO was planning to oust Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea (photo: The Telegraph)

The grapevine lapsed into silence but I was still alarmed. I tried to warn all ex-EO members that anything being said about Executive Outcomes having been resurrected was a lie.

Unbeknown to me, on or about 2 March 2004, a Boeing 727-100, with registration number N46l0, left the Hope Air Force Base in North Carolina, United States, made a brief refuelling stop at the Grantley Adams International Airport, and set course for Barbados. The aircraft, until very recently owned and operated by the United States Air Force, had been sold to a Kansas-based company known as Dodson Aviation Inc. Dodson, in turn, claimed that the plane had been sold to a company known as Logo Logistics, based somewhere in Africa. The Boeing was supposedly heading for South Africa.

Dodson Aviation had a very strong link to Fred Rindel (aka 'Watson') the man who had purportedly sold the surface-to-air missiles that had downed an EO aircraft, to UNITA. An investigation also found that he had trained Sierra Leone's RUF rebels in Liberia under the guise of having trained Charles Taylor's[458] blood-thirsty Liberian troops. The media had never shown any interest in the fact that RUF elements were being trained by South Africans.

At Wonderboom Airport, north of Pretoria, over 60 men 'under command' of Simon Mann boarded the Boeing and left for Harare, Zimbabwe, to refuel and load supplies and weapons en route to Equatorial Guinea. Everyone on board the aircraft was under the impression that they were taking part in a South African government sanctioned and sponsored operation. Mann was not on board the aircraft. He, along with two of the team leaders, was already in Harare, inspecting weapons that had been purchased from the Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI).

Wonderboom Airport, north of Pretoria, was the launching point for Simon Mann's operation to topple the president of Equatorial Guinea (photo: TEDA)

Whereas everyone on the aircraft was well aware of the pending operation, not all of them were aware of the country in question or the target. The team leaders were fully in the picture but totally unaware of what awaited them on arrival in Zimbabwe. Unbeknown to them, and for multiple reasons, the SA authorities had decided to abort the Equatorial Guinea operation, and advised their Zimbabwean counterparts to seize the aircraft and arrest its occupants upon arrival in Harare. Despite being complicit, the South African authorities did not prevent the aircraft from leaving SA. Instead, the mission appeared to have been given the 'green light' and the men were despatched as sacrificial lambs on the altar of politico-economic interests.

On 8 March 2004, the aircraft was summarily impounded at Harare International Airport shortly after it landed. All passengers and crew were arrested. Simultaneously, in Equatorial Guinea, a 15-man advance party under Niek du Toit was also taken into custody. Niek was an ex-EO commander who had proved his mettle both as a SADF Special Forces operator and in Sierra Leone.

The prime mover behind the plot was Logo Logistics, to which Simon Mann was in some way affiliated. Although I had never even heard of Logo Logistics, I was, according to subsequent media reports, very closely associated with both Mann and Logo Logistics.

The media never discussed the scheming surrounding this attempted coup d'état but its aftermath generated a huge amount of speculation. On 19 March 2004, a South African journalist by the name of Bruce Venter reported:

Executive Outcomes is now operating under the name of Saracen and has close links to Logo Logistics.

The men were recruited by 'an agent representing Logo Logistics, which had connections with the now defunct Executive Outcomes, a private security company owned by former SADF intelligence officer Eben (sic) Barlow'.

This was just further proof of the media's inability to get their facts correct. Either that or perhaps they had once again been tasked to report such nonsense. Venter's claim about Executive Outcomes operating as 'Saracen' made me wonder what the true motive of his purported 'intelligence source' had been—or if Venter was also on another payroll. Saracen was a company we had established for the express purpose of securing contracts related to physical security in Africa and beyond. Saracen owed both Nico and myself a tidy sum of money, but our attempts to get it had been largely unsuccessful as the director never returned any of our calls.

Venter's statement that I owned Executive Outcomes contradicted a previous press report from the 11th of March, asserting that Simon Mann, Simon Witherspoon, and Niek du Toit[459] (part of the Logo Logistics group arrested in Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea) 'formed the basis of Executive Outcomes'. This was just another lie that the media had propagated to mislead the public about EO's true composition and activities.

Henri van der Westhuizen,[460] (the man who had visited me with Eugene de Kok years before) popped up again—this time as Niek du Toit's partner. It looked like the 'man from MI' (at that time apparently a director of Executive Research Associates) certainly got around. It was small wonder the operation ended up being such a debacle if this was so. I am certain Niek was unaware of the games his partner was capable of playing.

The South African Institute of International Relations reported Johann Smith as saying:

'I used to command these guys', said Johann Smith, a former South African Defence Force commander, referring to the 80 suspected mercenaries now awaiting trial in Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe, where many were arrested allegedly en route to topple the government of President Obiang Nguema. 'There are 2 500 to 3 000 of them in South Africa. This will definitely happen again, given their current economic realities. One former soldier lamented that he had missed the Equatorial Guinea 'recruitment drive' by 30 minutes.'

Smith's statement had to be taken with a lot of salt. He had most certainly not commanded 'these guys', as he claimed. Perhaps he knew some of them, but that was all. I also wondered about a previous claim he had made to me about working in Equatorial Guinea. Did he know more than he was admitting?

The ramifications of the Equatorial Guinea fiasco would reach further. Mark Thatcher, son of the erstwhile British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was implicated in the coup. He had been living in South Africa since 1995. As the plot continued to unravel, the elite Scorpions police unit said it had arrested Thatcher after learning that he had put his house

on the market (for R22 million), arranged to sell four of his cars, found boarding schools in the US for his two children, and bought plane tickets to America for his family.

When officers arrived at his home in the upmarket Constantia suburb of Cape Town, they found his suitcases, ready and packed, in the hall.

Mark Thatcher, party to Simon Mann's failed coup in Equatorial Guinea, was arrested in Cape Town as he was preparing to flee (photo: The Telegraph)

Further details of the charges against Thatcher emerged. According to police, he had invested $271 000 to fund the logistics of the coup attempt. Sipho Ngwema, spokesperson for the Scorpions, was confident that the evidence they had against Thatcher would stand up in court.

"We have evidence that Thatcher has been financing the plot against Equatorial Guinea. We found information when we searched his residence that is going to assist us in the case," he said.

Thatcher denied involvement but was put under effective house arrest for allegedly having helped fund the coup attempt.

At subsequent court hearings, Thatcher admitted that he had paid for the helicopter that was to be used in the execution of the coup. The Mail & Guardian[461] reported:

Meanwhile the number of businessmen and establishment figures involved in the coup plot was widening. Jeffrey Archer,[462] who was dragged into the controversy after $134 000 (£74 000) was deposited into Mann's bank account in the name of J H Archer four days before the coup attempt, was at the Olympics in Athens. He referred inquiries to his lawyers in London. They said he had never met, spoken to, or communicated in any way with Mann, but the statement stopped short of denying he had paid the money into Mann's company account.

New allegations also emerged about the role of Greg Wales, a British businessman and friend of Mann's. He was named in a writ issued in the high court in London by the government of Equatorial Guinea. He was also identified as a conspirator by Du Toit. Ashley Jacobs, a South African security consultant, told The Guardian that Wales employed him to conduct an intelligence survey in Equatorial Guinea.

Thatcher was fined R3 million for his role in the coup plot and allowed to leave South Africa. His co-conspirators weren't that fortunate.

Simon Mann was sentenced to seven years imprisonment (later reduced to four) to be served in a particularly unpleasant Zimbabwean jail, but he managed to make his stay there very pleasant. With total disregard for the men who had ended up in the predicament he had orchestrated, Mann received special meals while they had to eat gruel. Life became even better for him when he was extradited to Equatorial Guinea where he was apparently served hot meals with wine, prepared in a nearby hotel.

In Zimbabwe, the men Mann had recruited were given sentences that ranged between six and fourteen months at the infamous Chikurubi Prison, a maximum security male prison located on the outskirts of Harare. In order not to embarrass themselves, the Zimbabwe authorities eventually charged the men with 'immigration violations'.

After leading men down the garden path, Simon Mann seemed quite unconcerned about having been arrested (photo: The Guardian)

A substantial portion of Simon Mann's legal bill—at his request—was footed by a handful of his employees, with the promise and assurance that he would reimburse them in due course. To date, Mann has not honoured his debt to those he led down the garden path.

Niek du Toit and his colleagues were sentenced to lengthy prison sentences in Equatorial Guinea. One of them died in jail, and when they were eventually pardoned and released, they were skeletons of men.

The rest of the men who appeared in court alongside Simon Mann were found not guilty—only to be charged again under the 'mercenary' law in South Africa.

According to the South African 'Foreign Military Assistance Act' South African citizens or residents may only partake in activities of a military nature beyond the borders of the country if the South African authorities have approved the specific activity concerned.

The magistrate found that the defence of the accused was corroborated by the witnesses for the State—to be exact, the accused all knew exactly what they were getting involved

in, but had only agreed to it because of the involvement and approval of the South African authorities.

Seven of the eight State Witnesses admitted, under cross-examination, that the South African government had been aware of the coup attempt and taken part in planning it.

This proved South African involvement unequivocally and the case was thrown out of court.

The State appealed this judgement which was subsequently heard in the Supreme Court by a panel of three Judges who unanimously upheld the finding of the Magistrates' Court.

Simon Mann's legal team provided proof in court that he had dined with a certain Nigel Morgan more than twenty times in the month leading up to the failed coup attempt. Morgan was an ex-Guards officer and friend of Simon Mann's who was, at the time, resident in South Africa, peddling intelligence to whoever would pay for it. In the industry such individuals are commonly known as 'intelligence whores'.

Morgan had apparently acted as the conduit/link between the South African intelligence services and Simon Mann. Being a fellow British officer who had served with him in Her Majesty's Forces, Mann trusted Morgan. This was apparently a critical error—Morgan continued to encourage Mann, and reassured him that the South African authorities supported the operation. This assurance was vital to Mann; the unforeseen delays in the implementation of the operation had caused very valid concerns about the security of the project as a whole—as well as the purported support of the South African government. Morgan even went as far as providing Mann with a personal assistant by the name of James Kershaw, and in the period leading up to the departure of the team from South Africa, Kershaw played an active role in planning and logistics.

As one of the members of Mann's ill-fated mission would later tell me:[463]

"We were not brought to court for at least one month, we were never visited by consular staff from the SA embassy—contrary to official statements from the SA government. We were, over the course of some months, formally charged with a number of offences, mostly so far-fetched and ridiculous that they would never have withstood scrutiny in a court of law - not even a farce such as a Zimbabwean court of law. Amongst those that I recall:

1. Attempting to assassinate President Robert Mugabe
2. Running military training camps in South Africa, to provide troops for the MDC opposition party in Zimbabwe. They even brought maps for me to show them the location of these so called 'training camps' in South Africa. When I offered to personally lead them to the locations as my map reading skills were not quite up to standard, the penny dropped and they threw me back into my cell and never raised the matter again.
3. Illegal purchase of 'weapons of war' inside Zimbabwe - the weapons were legally purchased from ZDI and the relevant receipts issued by them.

1 Being ‘Parachutists’ and ‘Deep Sea Divers’ for whatever that is worth in terms of constituting a chargeable offence. (Most of these charges were instated after they were supplied with our military service records by the South African authorities). We were then also dragged individually before a press team from Angola and questioned as to our previous involvement with Executive Outcomes in that country - which of course we denied, not wanting to add fuel to the fire. I personally informed the Angolan press that I was not under any legal obligation to answer questions from journalists.

“As we got deeper into the trial, all of these trumped-up charges were withdrawn. At around the fifth month mark of our incarceration, our legal representatives from South Africa, were summonsed to a meeting with the Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organisation (ZCIO). Also present was presiding Magistrate Govamombe. The ZCIO officials informed all present that as we had not in fact committed any crimes, there were no actual charges that could be brought to bear against us. However, they made it clear that the State of Zimbabwe was not prepared to suffer international embarrassment for falsely arresting and imprisoning us, so a ‘face saving’ outcome would have to be reached between all parties. This they suggested to be in the form of the group as a whole, pleading ‘Guilty’ to an ‘Immigration Violation’. This carried a fine in Zimbabwe dollars, the equivalent of R130. We would all pay the fine and then be released. This they thought would be the best course of action, as it could reasonably be explained by the fact that we had entered Zimbabwe without visas. (Visas were not in fact required as we were only to be in transit inside the aircraft).

“The ZCIO politely reminded our defence team that they were in a position to keep us imprisoned indefinitely and at their pleasure, if we refused to cooperate with their suggestion. This we knew only too well, having just spent six months incarcerated in rather difficult circumstances, without having committed any crime of any nature.

“Our lawyers called a meeting with representatives of the accused group, to relay the message from the ZCIO. They advised us to cooperate as there was simply no alternative avenue to explore, given the lack of independence of the Zimbabwean judiciary. Under the circumstances we were forced to agree. We were also informed by our defence team, that they had instructions from the South African authorities, that on our return, we were to keep absolutely quiet regarding any South African government involvement.

“At our next court appearance some two weeks later, we formally pleaded ‘Guilty’ to the ‘Immigration Violation’ as previously arranged. We were then remanded back into prison, to reappear for sentencing in a further two weeks’ time. When we reappeared, we were quite shocked to be sentenced to twelve months in jail - and not the R130 fines as previously arranged with the CIO and Magistrate Govamombe. Straight back into the prison…

“Later that day, our lawyers arranged a meeting with us, where we were informed that the Magistrate had called for, and met with our legal team immediately after pronouncing sentence. He told them that on the evening prior to passing sentence, he had been summoned by the ZCIO who tore up his sentencing documents in front of him, and told him that he would prescribe a jail sentence, and not the previously agreed upon fine. He

had apparently been most apologetic and said that his ‘hands were tied’ and that he could not go against the instructions of the ZCIO.

“Three members of the team could however not be found guilty of the so called ‘Immigration Violation’. These were Simon Mann, and the two team leaders who had entered Zimbabwe some days prior to the plane landing, in order to inspect the weapons bought from ZDI. Simon Mann was however remanded on additional charges as there was no way that they were going to release their ‘trump-card’ so easily.

“The other two were whisked straight from the court, situated in a shed inside the prison complex, to the Harare International Airport by members of our quick- thinking legal team, and managed to board an SAA flight that had purposely delayed departure in order to allow the men time to board. The ZCIO had reacted a wee bit too slowly, and even although they attempted to block the two men from getting through the formalities at the airport, they were too late, and the men boarded the plane amid the cheers of all of the civilian passengers, who were by now in the know and holding their breaths waiting for the men to board. Family members of one of the men had approached the pilot and explained the situation. The pilot had played ball and delayed the departure just long enough to allow the two men to exit the airport terminal and get on board.

“Taken back to our cells in Chikurubi, we found that all of our meagre possessions such as blankets, toothbrushes and home-made eating and drinking utensils, gathered over the past six months, had been looted, and we were once more forced to sleep on the bare concrete floor. Rumours abounded that Mugabe wanted to have the team extradited to Equatorial Guinea in exchange for oil deals from the EG government. Eight months later one evening, out of the blue and without prior warning, we were taken from our cells, and processed for release. There was a festive atmosphere amongst the prison guards, with particularly the senior ranks singing and dancing, being drunk as lords. We were loaded into prison vans, heavily escorted by armoured and other military vehicles, and driven off into the night. We were not informed of our final destination, and speculation amongst the men was rife that they were being taken to Buffalo Range to be put on board a military aircraft to be taken to Equatorial Guinea for trial and probable execution.

“At first light the prison vans arrived at the South African border. We exited one by one, were handed our passports, and stepped over onto South African soil. Freedom for some was short-lived; the team leaders and a few other senior members were subsequently charged the following day by the Scorpions for contravention of the ‘Foreign Military Assistance Act’ resulting in the previously mentioned trial, where they were all exonerated.

“We discussed the matter of these charges with the arresting officer from the Scorpions and informed him that we would, in our own defence, be forced to reveal the involvement of the South African authorities in the operation. This seemed not to faze the team from the Scorpions who informed us that the trial would take place and that their organisation had just had a new Head instated, and that he would pursue charges regardless”.

All the charges were subsequently dropped and the men are now free.

Following his release, Mann was quickly appointed as an 'advisor' to the president of Equatorial Guinea.[464] He was equally quick to lay claim to having been a founding member of EO.

In early 2005, I was again contacted and asked if I would consider restarting or reactivating Executive Outcomes. The caller, who claimed to be representing an African government that urgently needed help, told me he knew 'one of our companies' was operating 'just a few countries away' from his. I declined his request—after advising him that EO was no longer in existence. It was apparent that EO's name was still being bandied about in Africa and elsewhere.

On 19 December 2005, the Afrikaans daily, Beeld, pointed the finger at another so-called Executive Outcomes company. The article, translated from Afrikaans, reported:

First National Bank, an affiliate of First Rand has been sued for R 145 million in the Pretoria High Court for the alleged unauthorised use of a system to protect clients of the bank from fraud and theft.

Also being sued along with them is Mr Chris Troskie, the previous risk manager in the fraud division of First Card the credit division of First Rand.

The claimant is Mr Engelbertus Parkin, executive head of Executive Outcomes of Rustenburg.

It is astonishing that companies and their so-called managers believe they can get away with claiming that they represent or own a company known as 'Executive Outcomes'. I regard this as corporate identity theft.

During Executive Outcomes' lifetime, meetings held in our boardroom at Danny Street were covertly video-recorded for future use if ever any of them were disputed or 'denied'. Those tapes, along with the tapes of all of our recorded telephone discussions are still kept in a very secure location.

Phoney Executive Outcomes companies that ride on the back of our hard won reputation will continue to crop up as long as the media gives them attention and refuses to expose them, and as long as there are shadowy hands grasping for profits gained by duplicity. They will also continue to expose and compromise themselves if they act in the way they have been doing.

In the final analysis, Executive Outcomes had a renown and stature unequalled by everyone who has tried to copy it. Governments across the world approached us to assist them in solving their problems and we never failed in anything we did. Nor did we run away from danger; we faced it like the soldiers we were. Our reputation, established through hard work and the blood of good men, has now sadly been hijacked by phoney Executive Outcomes company profiles and marketing strategies.

The reputation of the real Executive Outcomes was written in blood and ink. It will always remain so.

As the founder and chairman of Executive Outcomes, I ought to carry the blame for entrusting certain men with responsibilities, and believing they would operate in the best interests of the company. It was that trust that opened the door to the company's demise.

49:
The Rewards of Disinformation

In 1996, American journalist Jim Hooper wrote the following on Sean Cleary: Soon after EO's involvement in Angola began the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) attempted to discredit the company by claiming its secret agenda was, among other things, the assassination of UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi. Parliament was urged to enact legislation preventing EO's foreign involvement. This opposition has waned since it was discovered that the source of fallacious reports was not only a paid consultant to the DFA and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, but, unknown to them, was also being paid by UNITA and a South African mining house with interests in areas controlled by UNITA. This revelation prompted sharp rebukes by other African countries, which accused an embarrassed Deputy President Mbeki and the DFA of supporting anti-democratic forces.

This disclosure was ignored by the South African media.

In his book, Dokument X, author Gunter Schickelgruber (nom de plume), referred to a newspaper article in Die Afrikaner which reported on a secret meeting held in Lyttelton, a suburb of Pretoria. On the agenda was a purported secret plan to destabilise the South African government and seize control by 2004. Those attending were listed as follows:

Beside Mr Roelf Meyer... Mr Pik Botha, General Magnus Malan, and Mr Rusty Evans, Director General of External Affairs (Department of Foreign Affairs), also present was Mr S Cleary, Johan Smith…

If Schickelgruber's information was correct, the purported plan by this group of miscreants to seize control of the government by 2004 failed miserably. Ironically, the man who had 'worked so hard' at trying to achieve stability in Angola was working equally hard to ensure instability in South Africa.

On 15 October 1999 Creamer Media's Engineering News reported that Cleary was involved in other ventures relating to the exploitation of resources in African countries:

A new South African consultancy providing risk-reduction and problem-solving services to large mining houses, junior mining companies, governments, and multilateral organisations has been established. The Johannesburg consultancy, Terra Certus, will focus particularly on managing risk associated with mining in sub-Saharan Africa.

Founder Richard Linnell, ex-Billiton chief of African exploration and development, with 30 years' experience in the metals field, believes that the time is right for an African renaissance and he trusts that Terra Certu—meaning positive earth—can play a role in facilitating the resource development needed to spur an African take-off.

In an exclusive interview with Mining Weekly, Linnell illustrates this vision with an example of his recent involvement in attempts at risk-reduction in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). After meeting President Laurent Kabila, it was agreed that an

approach would be made to the World Bank to facilitate the extension of the cover of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (Miga) to the DRC. Miga provides political risk cover for investors and its extension usually serves as a catalyst for wider private sector involvement. As a result of consultations in Washington, with the World Bank and the American Administration, it was agreed that a mission to the DRC would be made by a World Bank team if Kabila made a positive statement on macroeconomic issues. Following Linnell and Sean Cleary's (also of Terra Certus) assistance to Kabila in crafting his speech for the World Economic Forum in Windhoek in 1998, the World Bank was preparing to appoint its mission to the DRC and extend the Miga facility...

On 20 July 2003, the Confederal Afrikaner Forum meeting (held in Pretoria) reflected the following in their minutes (translated from Afrikaans):

Liesl Göttert advised the meeting that George Bush has appointed a consultant by the name of Sean Cleary to analyse Thabo Mbeki's speeches…

I had to smile. If Göttert's reporting was correct, then Cleary was reporting his discussions with his pen pals (President Thabo Mbeki and others) to members of the US government and giving them information. It appeared to me that he viewed betraying, even his so-called friends and clients, as par for the course. In essence, he was acting as an 'intelligence whore'—and being paid for it. The colour of the flag did not seem to matter —when it comes to intelligence, it simply doesn't for some people.

Acting as a consultant-cum-pen-pal to President Thabo Mbeki, Anglo American's Peter Gush, the late Dr Jonas Savimbi of UNITA, the DFA, MI, and anyone else who would listen to—and pay for—his lies, Cleary had taken great pains to point out the negative impact Executive Outcomes was having on Angola in his regular 'Angolan Update'[465] newsletter.

He had also claimed (despite all evidence to the contrary) that EO was intent

on destabilising Angola and Africa, and that the assistance we had given the FAA in rapidly defeating UNITA on the battlefield had actually prolonged the war. It was obvious that Cleary viewed his clients, friends, and readership as morons.

When the Sunday Times of 7 December 2003 published an article headlined 'SA company to protect Iraqi oil', I immediately took note of this further Cleary development. It also confirmed the adage: It's not what you know, but who you know.

The article reported the following:

A Johannesburg-based security company has been awarded a multimillion- dollar contract by Iraq's government of occupation to protect the war-ravaged country's oil industry.

Directors of Erinys International, which has headquarters in Midrand, have tried to keep details of the contract—reportedly worth almost $40 million— confidential, but nevertheless confirm on their website that, from May, they had established in-country capability, under expatriate (UK) management, to provide security services within Iraq'.

According to information filed with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Erinys and its subsidiaries are based in South Africa and headed by up to four directors, at least three of whom are resident in South Africa and have South African identity numbers.

However, a personal assistant for Jonathan Peter James Garratt, Erinys' managing director, insisted this week that the Iraq contract 'has nothing to do with South Africa', and was being managed from Dubai, Jordan and Iraq.

She said Garratt was in Iraq, where his company had been contracted by the occupying Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to train Iraqis to protect Iraq's oil reserves.

According to an oil industry journal, Erinys was awarded a year-long, $39.5-million contract 'to train 6 500 Iraqis to guard oil pipelines, wellheads, and refineries, as well as water and electrical facilities'.

Erinys had 'beat out larger and more established competitors' to clinch the contract, the online, US-based Oil Industry Journal stated.

The report suggested that this was due to Erinys' experience in the Middle East, including Iraq, where it provided security services to US engineering group Bechtel and a subsidiary of US-based energy group Halliburton.

According to a report in the Financial Times, the CPA's inability to provide comprehensive security to civilians in Iraq had created a 'gold rush' for companies such as Erinys, which was well connected to the British military establishment. As a result of recruitment drives by Erinys and other security companies, former members of specialist regiments were in demand and could expect wages of £400 a day in Iraq, it said.

Garratt's assistant in Midrand, who declined to provide her name, insisted that the Iraq contract 'had nothing to do with us', and that it was being run entirely from the Middle East

However, information lodged with the DTI[466] in Pretoria shows that the company named after the snake-haired Greek deity who torments criminals unpunished by their fellow mortals is steered by South Africans.

Garratt is identified as a resident of the Dainfern housing estate near Midrand and has a South African ID number indicating his age as 41. Other directors of Erinys[467] include Christian Gouws of Menlo Park, Pretoria, and Sean Michael Cleary of Constantia, Cape Town. A fourth director, Alastair Morrison, is listed as living in France.

Garratt's assistant said Gouws and Cleary had resigned from the company, but their departures were not reflected in the latest data from the DTI.

Reading the article, I recalled Johann Smith telling me that Cleary had intended to create a company in the Executive Outcomes mould but that he first needed to 'neutralise' EO. In that endeavour, he had called upon MI, DFA, the UN, and his friends in the US Department of State, as well as those in business and the media. These actions had been handsomely funded by unwitting South African taxpayers. The US, it appeared, had handsomely rewarded Cleary for contributing towards the disinformation campaign against EO.

Sean Cleary liaised closely with DFA, MI, and foreign governments to discredit EO so that he could start his own PMC. He was eventually well rewarded by the US (photo: YouTube.com)

Fortnight Publications viewed the matter of Cleary's involvement in Iraq as follows:

The company ultimately responsible for bringing the South Africans to Iraq, Erinys, is headed by Sean Cleary, formerly both a diplomat and senior figure in South African Military Intelligence during the apartheid era. He is mainly remembered as a key figure in Pretoria's links with the Angolan rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi. Wealthy and suave, Cleary now presents himself as a world- renowned expert on conflict resolution.

That a liar and deceiver such as he could claim to be an expert in 'conflict resolution' was disconcerting. His expertise lay more in conflict development and destabilisation than in anything else. But with an equally deceptive and dishonest media singing his praises, he could no doubt hoodwink anyone into believing whatever he wanted. His deployment as a 'Counsellor' to the South African embassy in Washington between 1978 and 1982 had, no doubt, helped to establish his position and ensure the contract in Iraq.

The article went on to state:

It is worth noting that the South African government's strong opposition to the war (in Iraq) was apparently no bar to the Coalition doing business with Cleary. No doubt Bush and Co fully understand that he represents the old South Africa, not the new, and find that perfectly congenial. The South African government is perturbed that former members of the apartheid security forces have been making careers as mercenaries.

The Hermanus Times of 10 March 2005 carried a small report about a talk Cleary[468] was to deliver to the U3A[469] Overberg meeting on 11 March 2005. It reported:

Cleary, chief executive of Strategic Concepts, and a member of a number of think-tanks and institutions here and abroad, argues that what happens in the seething cauldron of the Middle East affects Africa and the world.

He believes the US-led attempt to impose Anglo-Saxon values on other cultures has sparked a revival of religious fundamentalism—not just in Islam, and that Washington failed to consider fully the implications of its actions.

This was a rich statement coming from Cleary who had so handsomely profited from the US-led invasion of Iraq through his company, Erinys International. He didn't complain then.

The Centre for Civil Society said the following about Erinys:

Erinys International, founded by apartheid-era military intelligence officer Sean Cleary, has a nearly R500 million contract to train Iraqi soldiers and protect oil installations. With the support of close business associates of the Iraqi politician Ahmed Chalabi, Erinys has employed South African military specialists to train hundreds of members of Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. Speculation in Iraq suggests that Erinys is helping Chalabi build a personal army.

Erinys' past activities are as unsavoury as DynCorp's. In August 2003, the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining, a Ghanaian organisation, released a report detailing human rights abuses perpetrated by Erinys personnel at an Ashanti gold mine. The report details eyewitness accounts of the torture and killings of local small-scale miners between 1994 and 2002.

Unsurprisingly, the South African and international media had little to say about Cleary's Erinys International and the alleged atrocities it had committed in the name of money—an activity that Executive Outcomes never engaged in, or condoned, despite Cleary and the media having claimed it did. Erinys, on the other hand, never denied the allegations of atrocities levelled against it.

It is estimated that the number of South Africans working in Iraq at the height of its troubles was anywhere between 5 000 and 10 000 men.

In a recent report, the UN stated that South Africa was among the top three suppliers of PMCs in Iraq. The other two were the US and the UK. The most sought- after South Africans were those who served in the old elite units such as Special Forces, 32 Battalion, the Parachute Battalion, Koevoet, and others. Several of these men applied for and received amnesty at the South African TRC. Some have become casualties of the war in Iraq. Two of those killed, Francois Strydom and Deon Gouws, were employed by Erinys.

Cleary was not the only one who profited handsomely from the campaign to neutralise Executive Outcomes. Lured by the salaries offered, many of the intelligence operatives who worked so hard to fabricate false intelligence reports about EO and hide them under security classifications, later rushed off to find employment in countries where EO had worked. They are now happily employed by PMCs and NGOs in conflict areas and suddenly regard the concept of working for a private military company perfectly acceptable.

Equally interesting, the South African media has been remarkably silent about many of those who worked so hard to discredit EO and feed them lies about the company—lies

they were quick to swallow and in many instances, wittingly publish. Many of these charlatans now lecture at universities or hold posts at the UN as 'specialists'. For them, hypocrisy and lying appears to have been the path to financial success and rewards.

Colonel Jan Breytenbach, who ran the training facility for the IFP's Caprivi group on behalf of MI—codenamed Operation Marion—and who falsely accused EO of having trained hit squads for the ANC in the media, is now happily doing business with the ANC. Bulelani Ngcuka's[470] Amabubesi Investments company acquired a major stake in a lucrative golf and luxury residential estate industry near the town of George in the Cape Province.[471] The development was headed by the former Special Forces and 32 Battalion founder turned conservation consultant—Colonel Jan Breytenbach.

Those who worked to neutralise Executive Outcomes by whatever means possible, have truly been well rewarded.

Bulelani Ngcuka's Amabubesi Investments employed Col Jan Breytenbach after Breytenbach lied to the media regarding EO's supposed training of ANC 'hit squads' in Angola (Photo EPA)

50:
Looking Back in 2017

It has been more than two decades since I walked away from Executive Outcomes and left it in the care of a select group of the men who had worked beside me. Sadly, a year and a few months after my departure, they closed down the company and Executive Outcomes ceased to be.

Some who played roles (of varying degrees of importance) in EO have subsequently claimed to have been 'founders' or 'senior directors' in the company. Many who never even served in EO have also come forward and claimed to have played important roles.

The smear campaign against EO and myself had different kinds of negative fall- out. It took years to rectify the damage to our reputation, and we also took heavy financial damages, but more than that, the human loss and infrastructural damage created by those who fuelled the conflicts and wars we were involved in will never truly be known.

Fortunately, some African governments saw through the disinformation campaign and continued to ask for my assistance as a political, intelligence, and defence/security advisor.

Several of my so-called friends, lending their ears to innuendo and rumour, believed what they had read and were quick to terminate all contact with me. They showed me how superficial those friendships were and I do not mourn having lost them.

Having been shunned by many members of 32 Battalion's Veteran's Association, I broke all ties with the battalion I was so proud to have been part of. I felt no desire to defend either myself or EO from falsehoods. Men who should have known better, didn't.

As a proud ex-SADF soldier, I have found a home with a 'league of extraordinary gentlemen' at Rooiplaas,[472] an association of airborne soldiers from different service arms and units that served in the parachute battalions or 44 Parachute Brigade.

The author (seated, second from right) formally receives his Rooiplaas membership

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Angola has entered a period of difficult growth and survival. Subsequent to Dr Jonas Savimbi's death on 22 February 2002,[473] Angola returned to a precarious state of peace with the MPLA and UNITA working to rebuild the shattered country despite their differences. To the north and east of the country, pressure is mounting. Within Angola, determining a political direction that will advantage the country and its citizens remains ongoing. Sometime in the early 2000s, UNITA admitted that it was still completing its transformation from 'Maoism to social democracy to conservatism'.[474] I am still amazed at the pre-1994 South African government's desire to install a Maoist government in Angola whilst professing to adhere to Christianity. But truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

The duplicitous game the South African political establishment played in the 1980s and into the early 1990s—supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Military Intelligence, and lackeys such as Cleary—was finally exposed, if only partially. With this exposure, I finally understood the importance of 'foreign interests' and their close relationship with greed and personal enrichment at the expense of taxpayers—and why the National Party government was prepared to sacrifice its soldiers to create a Maoist state in Angola.

Politically and economically isolated during its final decade, South Africa's National Party secretly turned to the People's Republic of China (PRC, also known as 'China') whilst publically proclaiming support for Taiwan (ROC, officially the Republic of China). China claimed sovereignty over Taiwan under its One-China policy, and refused diplomatic relations with any country that recognised Taiwan. South Africa, however, enjoyed a cosy relationship with both China (in secret) and Taiwan (in public).

China, an ally to several so-called liberation movements in Africa (including the ANC and the PAC) was also secretly selling arms to South Africa who, in turn, were passing them to UNITA through Projects Spyker and Silver. The objective of these secret Military Intelligence projects was to strengthen UNITA militarily to defeat the MPLA government in Angola. South Africa's public utterances of scorn and distaste for China cloaked its secret dealings with Beijing (China's seat of government).

On 1 November 2017, an investigative editorial revealed that the Nationalist Party and China had fact cooperated for several years:[475]

It appears that this trade had started by the early 1980s and was obscured by the use of a codename for the PRC, probably drawn from the popular local beer brand, 'Hansa'. This illegal arms trade was facilitated directly by the South African military, with the help of Military Intelligence, and an Armscor front company.

In this case, the weapons were sent from China's state-owned arms company, the military industrial behemoth Norinco, to the South Africans. From there it was distributed with the complicity of the Chinese state to Pretoria's allies: UNITA in Angola and RENAMO in Mozambique. The list of weapons paints a morbid picture and in one

recorded deal included rocket launchers, AK47's, 20,000 rounds of ammunition, and 200 bombs weighing 250kg each.

To hide the trade from prying eyes, and to allow both parties to keep a discreet distance, a middleman was needed. They found a mutual friend in Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC). Mobutu a renowned kleptocrat was an ally of UNITA's Jonas Savimbi and close to Washington, Paris, and enjoyed a good relationship with Pretoria's military intelligence.

A classified Foreign Affairs memo dated the 2nd of March 1983 details how the conduit was set up. Zaire, with Mobutu's sign-off and for a fee, provided the end user certificates fraudulently identifying Zaire as the final destination for the weapons. In order to complete the ruse, an Armscor front company registered in Geneva, named Adam Export, was used to obscure South African involvement. Zaire agreed to allow two South Africans, through Adam Export, to act on Zaire's behalf in contracting with Norinco.[476]

This cosy relationship continued even after South Africa agreed to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, effectively ending its operations in Angola and support to UNITA.

UNITA benefitted greatly from all sides. The US supported UNITA and provided it with Stinger surface-to-air missiles. China would, once UNITA came to power, entrench itself in a Maoist Angola. In addition, South Africa had covertly provided China with sophisticated missile technology. The South African taxpayers had unknowingly funded many of these actions. Under a UNITA government, South Africa would have access to Angola's diamonds and oil. For this South African troops died and Executive Outcomes had to be removed from Angola.

In 2007, I learnt that US citizen, Maurice Tempelsman, had been responsible for getting US funds and support to set Savimbi up in the diamond trade with De Beers. He also had his own diamond-cutting facility, and was apparently working with De Beers to prevent African countries from gaining commercial control over the cutting industry. It was reported that, on 10 October 1996, Tempelsman met Tony Lake, the National Security Advisor. He and his deputy, Shawn McCormick, persuaded the Assistant Secretary of State (George E Moose) to give Tempelsman a letter suggesting that the US would finance his plans. In May 1997 the US Ambassador for Angola, Donald Steinberg met Savimbi to present the Tempelsman plan which involved UNITA keeping the diamond mines under their control and selling diamonds only via De Beers. Thus, US foreign policy was shaped to benefit De Beers.[477] This may explain the US' desire to get EO out of Angola and Sierra Leone—and why Debswana was so quick to cancel EO's training contract once our engagement by the Angolan government had become known.

Maurice Templesman received US funding to support Savimbi in the diamond trade with De Beers (photo: The Namibian)

Regardless of what everyone claimed, insinuated, said, and wrote, the FAA's final defeat of UNITA on the battlefield led to negotiations that brought about a change in the political climate, and Executive Outcomes' role in helping the FAA to achieve this remains undisputed. The negotiations generated a burst of investment which laid the foundation for a much-deserved stability. I hope that the many deaths in that conflict—of men from the FAA, UNITA, the SADF, SWAPO's PLAN, the ANC, and Executive Outcomes—were not in vain. However, surrounded, as it is, by conflict- ridden countries, Angola cannot afford to ignore the potential of conflict spill-over into its territory.

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Sierra Leone is likewise still struggling to come to terms with its past but here, too, the role of Executive Outcomes remains part of its history—despite attempts to negate EO's role. Shortly after the company's departure, chaos once again erupted with the arrival of a UN Force to 'secure peace' and, once again, foreign embassies had to be evacuated. It took an aggressive British force to release the hostages (some of them British servicemen who had been captured by the RUF) and the financial and human cost of this UN-orchestrated debacle by far overshadowed the costs of the Executive Outcomes contract in Sierra Leone. More recently, the devastating effects of Ebola dented the already-fragile nation and Sierra Leone is once more teetering on the brink of civil conflict.

Liberia, once ruled by Charles Taylor and his ruthless Libyan backed rebel group, the National Patriot Front of Liberia (NPFL) has also undergone changes, but that did not happen before that country's role in the civil war in Sierra Leone was finally exposed. During the mid-1990s, Taylor provided Sankoh's RUF with a safe haven, training (given by Fred Rindel and other South Africans), and equipment. Liberia also became a conduit for Sierra Leone's illegally mined diamonds to South Africa and elsewhere. Having become rich from trading in precious woods, gold, and diamonds, Taylor was able to sustain the civil war in Liberia and sponsor the RUF. When a peace deal was signed

between the various domestic warring groups in 1995, Taylor effectively became Liberia's ruler until he was elected president in 1997. The warlord-cum-president soon found himself under threat from other Liberian-based rebels and, in 2003, he resigned and went into exile in Nigeria. Taylor was extradited back to Liberia in 2006, and taken to stand trial in The Hague for war crimes. During his trial, it was made known that Taylor:

1. Created and directed the RUF
2. Acted as a US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) asset. The DIA apparently acknowledged that Taylor had been an asset since the 1980s[478] but refused to give details citing the need to protect 'intelligence sources and methods'.

1 Had extensive gold[479] and diamond business dealings with US TV evangelist Pat Robertson[480] as early as 1994. Robertson used his 'Operation Blessing' aircraft to ferry diamond mining equipment[481] to Liberia—and diverted his ministry's donations to his diamond ventures in Liberia. Robertson apparently also had similar dealings with Zairean president Mobuto Sese Seko.

Taylor, Liberia's 22nd president, was sentenced to 50 years in prison.

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The agenda of the Western governments that continually told South Africa to act against EO was plain to see for those who were willing to look: they wanted their own sponsored PMCs positioned in Africa so that they could protect and expand their foreign interests, but first, EO needed to be stopped. South Africa was unable to see what was happening or to understand the agenda.

In 2006, I met a senior official who was very closely associated with coordinating and analysing the intelligence-feed into the NICOC, especially as far as Executive Outcomes was concerned. He summarised events as follows:

At the time, I found it amazing that the government would actually go to the lengths of formulating a law to stop one man—you. In their defence, you need to remember that every man and his dog was feeding them lies and stories about you. The pressure from the international community—especially the US was enormous. Eventually, they buckled as the threats against them escalated. By the time they realised they had been deceived and lied to, it was too late to do anything.

Running parallel to the pressure on government, from the West in particular, were the numerous African governments who accused us of hypocrisy and asked us to leave you alone. They viewed the government's attacks on, and actions against you and EO, as proof that South Africa supported destabilisation in Africa.

The South African government had no choice. But, their condemnation of you and your company remains, to this day, a problem in many African countries who still regard you

and your men as the only people willing to stand up against terror and anarchy.

You were stitched up. When you left Executive Outcomes, the government lost what was arguably its best ability to rapidly project any semblance of positive force, influence, or assistance to African countries in need.

Although his comment was not entirely correct (EO was granted a government license to operate) his comments reinforced just how desperate people were to stop the company.

He merely told me what I had known or suspected all along.

I still maintain that when Executive Outcomes permanently closed its doors, the South African government lost a perfect vehicle for projecting and bringing about positive influence and stability in Africa. The void was rapidly filled by international PMCs attempting to do very much the same kind of thing. A new phrase has been coined to define them; 'security contractors'.

Thousands of such security contractors are now to be found across Africa and elsewhere without as much as a disapproving murmur from the South African media—but success also seems to elude them.

The countries we worked in found themselves caught up in the international economic and political blackmail game with varying results. The people in these conflict areas still see us as the men who were determined to bring them stability, at times sacrificing ourselves for their peace. To others, we remain the people who upset duplicitous foreign agendas. Of course we were paid for our services—no one gives professional services for free—not even those journalists that chose the shaky moral high ground, and nobly cried foul because EO was paid.

Many of the men who worked for Executive Outcomes, and remained loyal to the company until the day it closed its doors, are now working in conflict areas across the world, often sideby-side with—or for—those who condemned them. Others are without work or income and struggling to come to terms with their lives. Many ex-EO men remain in contact with me and are surprised that they are not being persecuted by the media now that they are working outside of Angola, Sierra Leone, or indeed Africa, despite the fact that the areas they currently operate in require a similar offensive posture to the one we had to adopt.

The general feeling amongst many of us is that Angola and Sierra Leone were more than just African countries—they were countries desperately in need of help having been cursed with natural resources and inhabited by vulnerable populations that had been failed by their governments and the international community. We are also convinced that the motivations for wanting us out of those countries had nothing to do with the allegations that we were upsetting their fragile internal stability and everything to do with financial greed, political influence, resource control, and power. It is interesting to me that STTEP,[482] likewise, remains a domestic and international media target as soon as an African government engages with it. It is not difficult to understand why.

Western PMCs now operate across the world, and thousands of ex-soldiers, ex-policemen, and even some ex-MK members from South Africa—both black and white—

are flocking to war-ravaged areas to join forces against terrorism and bring about peace. For many of these men, it is the only trade they know and, despite the dangers involved, the only manner in which they can earn a living.

In January 2006, Arthur Walker,[483] one of the helicopter pilots who selflessly flew through anti-aircraft fire to get to our men in Angola and Sierra Leone commented as follows:

Executive Outcomes was the greatest company I have ever worked with or been associated with. As an ex-South African Air Force pilot who had flown in the former Rhodesia and in Angola and Namibia for South Africa, I was initially hesitant to join a commercial venture. I do not regret a single moment. Of course, there were downs to it...for example I believe that the host-governments we worked for should have given us more support in terms of the equipment we needed. Had they done that, the wars in Angola and Sierra Leone would have been over much quicker.

The professionalism in the company was however astonishing. The logistics to maintain so many men in the field was truly mind-boggling. It is incomprehensible for anyone who wasn't there to realise that the logistical lines were almost double the length of those run by the old-SADF and much more efficient, with far less manpower and aircraft.

South Africa lost what was arguably one of its greatest assets when the company closed its doors.

Now, hundreds of ex-South African soldiers, airmen and policemen are doing exactly what we did, yet no one gives a damn. One day, the truth will hopefully emerge as to why we were so hounded, spied on, discredited, and back-stabbed. Looking back on it all, I can only say that you had one hell of a company. If ever you need to do it again, call me.

Arthur Walker was one of the ex-South African Air Force helicopter pilots who flew for EO. He passed away in 2016 (photo: The Observation Post)

Amended legislation (the Bill on Foreign Military Assistance or The Prohibition of Mercenary Activities and Regulation of Certain Activities in a Country of Armed Conflict Bill) placing an outright ban on any form of South African involvement in mercenary activity was approved in the National Assembly on 29 August 2006. It will impact South Africans the world over, even those serving in foreign armed forces. Ironically, the bill will affect many of those who worked so hard to get it introduced so they could stop Executive Outcomes. It will also disadvantage African governments who look south for assistance, advice, support, and training when other African governments are unable to help them.

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On 15 December 2005, the last members of what was once the world's largest UN peacekeeping operation pulled out of Sierra Leone. At its height in 2001, this peacekeeping force consisted of approximately 17 500 men. The exact financial cost of the mission will probably never be known, but it was huge.

Across Africa, the UN's lack of strategic and operational direction, discipline, leadership, and success, was clearly illustrated during its deployment in the DRC in 2005, a deployment that continues to this day and has cost hundreds of millions of US dollars. Throwing money at the problem has not had the result the UN hoped for and, despite its noble mission, it remains a bloated and ineffective organisation that is plagued by allegations of misconduct wherever it puts its boots.

In reaction to numerous claims of sexual assault involving abuse of women by UN forces, ex-Secretary-General Kofi Annan banned peacekeepers with the DRC's UN Mission (known as MONUC) from associating and fraternizing with the local population. In an undated letter to the Security Council, Annan requested 100 military police and qualified French-speaking investigators so that 'self-monitoring programmes' to 'root out' abuse could be conducted. The UN watchdog (the Office of Internal Oversight Services) found that MONUC personnel had been sexually exploiting Congolese women and underage girls, and the UN claimed to have investigated 150 allegations of misconduct (including gang rape) against some 50 soldiers based in DRC's north-eastern town of Bunia. The multi-disciplinary team of investigators led by Assistant Secretary-General Angie Kane looked into the matter. It appears they are still 'looking'.

Referring to the UN's role in Libya, Middle Eastern specialist Richard Galustian commented:[484]

More failed talks. It's enough…after six years of UN failure…

Only France and Italy have developed, though almost opposing, strategies for Libya, while the EU in Brussels, US and UK and worse of all, the UN, have none that are founded in reality…

UN envoy Ghassan Salame said, after a month of talks in Tunis with a variety of Libyan actors, on Saturday that "no discernible progress has been made toward stabilising Libya and paving the way for elections." Salame added discussions would continue, notably without giving a new date…

The UN's central objective was to amend the now in reality moribund LPA amendments to a previous UN-mediated plan signed two years ago!...

The first Prime Minister after the revolt against Gaddafi was Dr. Mahmoud Jibril who has such disdain for the UN he didn't bother to attend the last meeting in Tunis. He did however attend a Libya Conference last week in Belgium…

If Libya is not stabilised soon there could be a catastrophic domino effect in North Africa with the next target for turmoil almost certainly being Tunisia.

One can only hope his warning will be heeded.

Middle East specialist Richard Galustian has been critical of the UN's failures in, especially Libya (photo: Gulf News)

The birth and growth of the African Union (AU) has followed a similar course. The decision to establish such an organisation was indeed a gigantic step in the right direction for Africa. However, as long as the AU looks beyond the continent for financial sponsors and receives training from those who have no understanding of the complexities of conflict and war in Africa, it will remain an ineffectual proxy force for large foreign financial contributors.

The United Nations' Department of Peacekeeping has attempted to change its image as a cumbersome and ineffectual peacekeeping organisation. It, too, seems to have finally come to the realisation that there can be no peacekeeping if there is no peace, but its perceived lack of effectiveness, impartiality, and credibility will soil its reputation for years to come, and its absence whilst the shooting continues remains conspicuous.

'Peacekeeping' remains a financially bloated farce, wracked with corruption, incompetence, and a lack of success. On 25 September 2005, it was reported:[485]

South African peacekeeping operations in Africa remain on the government's priority list, says the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), tabled in parliament on Tuesday.

Defence and intelligence's revised estimate for this year (2005/06) is R25,4bn, the document reports, increasing to R29,1bn by the 2008/09 financial year.

A large contingent of South African troops, often operating under the United Nations or African Union banner, are deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Ivory Coast and other African countries.

Troops on the ground, however, have expressed concern over stretched supply lines and shortages of key equipment considered vital in carrying out their operations in areas often devoid of basic infrastructure.

"Plans to modernise and improve the combat readiness of the SANDF to fulfil its constitutional mandate will be strengthened by additional allocations in the 2006 MTEF', the MTBPS says.

The SANDF, despite its attempts to act as a peacekeeping force—with a massive budget, has likewise not achieved the success it hoped for.

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I am no longer openly and actively harassed by MI, DFA, the SAPS, or their other associates. I am also no longer apprehended at foreign airports and subjected to lengthy interrogations, although I don't doubt for an instant that I am still in their crosshairs.

Whilst dining at a Planet Hollywood restaurant in Paris in July 2005 I became conscious of two men (who struck me as typical South African intelligence operatives) sitting close by and trying to look inconspicuous. They were trying very hard to overhear the 'sinister plot' I was discussing with someone else. After dinner, I approached them, introduced myself, and told them they had been compromised. Their flimsy cover story gave me a good laugh. We left them sitting embarrassed at their table.

Many of the intelligence agents and operatives that worked in MI and SDCI have subsequently lost their jobs or resigned from the services. So, too, have many of the DFA staff who lied to the government about Executive Outcomes—including Rusty Evans, the director general, who bailed out with a so-called golden parachute. Their departures will be missed by few as they never had the interest of the country or the continent at heart. Denuded of their once mighty power, they are now nobodies with even less influence.

I often see some of these unethical ex-intelligence officers at defence exhibitions, bowing and scraping to the African military officers they are accompanying. If only their guests knew how deceitful and motivated by greed they were—or that their agendas have seldom included the creation of stability.

Several of the ex-intelligence officers who came to plead for 'forgiveness' for their roles in discrediting EO have begged for employment in the same breath.

Many of the SAP/SAPS members who worked against us have accepted contracts in countries where Executive Outcomes once worked. Some of these men, such as Andre van

Taak, rushed off to find work in Angola as 'risk assessment' officers as soon as the conflict there ended. They were very keen to condemn us to hell but they were equally quick to accept Angolan and Sierra Leonean money. If nothing else, it makes one think.

My one-time agent, confidante of Savimbi, and associate of Sean Cleary, Johann Smith, is now viewed as a specialist advisor on African and other security matters. He often gives political commentary on specific topics over the radio and he is seemingly one of the first the media call on when they need some input into a conflict area. Smith is happy to oblige.

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In July 2006, the South African History Archive (SAHA), an independent non-governmental organisation based at the University of the Witwatersrand, submitted an access for information request in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act, to the Department of Defence, requesting a copy of my personnel SADF records on my behalf. I wanted to see what disinformation had been placed on my file. It took more than twelve months and several follow-up requests before the Department was finally able to provide me with a copy of my military records.

Although the department has limited capacities in this regard and may be struggling to process requests, personnel files ought to be relatively simple to locate and provide, as experienced by SAHA in other matters.

When a copy of my file was eventually given to me, it was heavily redacted and therefore, a lot of information I considered important was not available to me.

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The media will be almost sure to mention EO any time a new African conflict appears on their radar. Still intent on finding someone to accuse or blame, they blandly ignore the fact that the company closed for business more than two decades ago. EO's name is still regularly used to spice up their often-misleading reports. This attitude is especially prevalent amongst the many internet journalists-cum- specialists on EO. Since we were falsely accused of pillaging, resource theft, atrocities, diamond smuggling, arms trafficking, the murder of women and children, and anything else they could conjure, there is really not too much that can still be laid at the door of this once highly effective and disciplined company. Despite countless in-depth investigations, their allegations have all been dismissed as smears.

Many of the South African journalists who drove the campaign to discredit and condemn EO and myself found themselves in difficult positions when their erstwhile paymasters deserted them. With the change of government in 1994, their 'confidential' and 'undisclosed sources' disappeared (especially after the ANC made sweeping changes in the Department of Foreign Affairs[486] and intelligence establishments) and several were exposed for having worked for intelligence services.

Die Afrikaner of 12–18 July 1996 listed some of these journalists and their paymasters. The publication corresponded with rumours that abounded at the time—and what I had

been told by my agents in the intelligence services. Among them were:

Peta Thornycroft: Agent for Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organisation (ZCIO). De Wet Potgieter: Agent for South African Military Intelligence (MI).

Stephan Laufer: KGB agent.

Those who were exposed as agents responded with indignation.

Peta Thornycroft was alleged to be a ZCIO agent. Her writing about EO badly lacked truth (photo: IWMF)

Those whose names did not appear on the list (and there are many who were never identified) must have breathed a sigh of relief. Some of them, such as Ingo Capraro, are still firmly embedded in the fabric of the media. Some may even one day try to justify or explain why they deliberately tried to distort public perceptions of the company without any form of accountability by writing their own accounts of Executive Outcomes' story.

Ingo Capraro, apparently controlled by an MI officer in Cape Town, revelled in his attacks against EO (photo: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung)

De Wet Potgieter, the author of a plethora of false statements about Executive Outcomes is still writing. His erstwhile masters at MI have gone quiet.

Self-styled ‘expert’ on Executive Outcomes, Khareen Pech, has now apparently embraced Buddhism. Perhaps the lies dripping from her poisoned pen awakened her conscience…but I doubt it.

Sean Cleary is still working as an ‘advisor’ and as the founder of the PMC Erinys.

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Roelf van Heerden and Carl Alberts, both ex-EO men, have written books about the roles they played in Executive Outcomes and thereafter. Our descriptions of how certain events unfolded in EO, the reasons we give for how and why they took place, and some dates may differ, but I am pleased that they have documented their roles. I am sure—and hope—that others will follow.

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Africa has, especially over the past two decades, experienced an increase in conflict and war driven by religious fanaticism, politically motivated anti- government forces, and proxy forces. The majority of these conflicts and wars are motivated by a desire for Africa’s resources—oil, diamonds, gold, coltan, and other precious minerals. These, and similar conflicts, will continue to escalate as long as the continent remains in denial.

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The world, as we once knew it, changed dramatically on 11 September 2001. The shocking suicide attacks on the Twin Towers in New York—broadcast world-wide over television—resulted in the deaths of nearly 3 000 people who had innocently been going about their daily lives.

Retaliation was swift. Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded and occupied by US led coalition forces in apparent efforts to end the terror wreaked by those who wished to impose their radical religious view of the world on everybody else.

Several weeks prior to the invasion of Iraq, someone from ‘Macalister and Associates’ (ostensibly based in Japan) phoned me to ask whether I would consider reviving EO. The caller made it clear, in his broad American accent, that EO could play an important role in the build up to the invasion of Iraq, and also offered large financial rewards. I declined.

The invading forces went in with poorly developed strategies based on insufficient and sub-standard intelligence, outdated doctrines, and a blatant disregard for the principles of warfare, and enjoyed limited success. Indeed, the problems seem to be escalating with no resolution in sight. The civilian casualties and collateral damage have been horrendous.

The dramatic rise in terrorism driven by religious fanaticism has also spread its wings across the Middle East and several African countries, especially in north, west, and east Africa and its effects are being felt in Nigeria, Libya, Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Cameroon, Kenya, and other countries. The influx, into Europe, of refugees fleeing these war-torn countries is creating its own set of problems; terrorism in Europe has become a frequent occurrence—much of it instigated by religious foot

soldiers disguised as refugees. This scourge is slowly creeping southwards, yet Africa— and South Africa and its neighbours in particular— remain seemingly blind to the developing threat.

The USA, the UK, and several other countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa have now discovered that harbouring, encouraging, training, supporting, and equipping terrorists or so-called 'dissidents' and/or 'freedom fighters' is not the noble gesture they once considered it to be. Millions of people have been killed in efforts to curb terrorism and end civil war. The idea of 'One man's terrorist' being 'another man's freedom fighter' has indeed come home to roost.

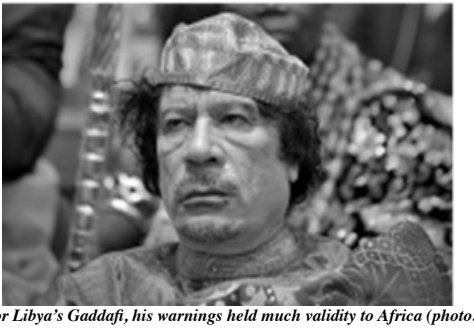
The flood gates that opened after the disastrous regime change in Libya was, in many ways, the catalyst for frenzied bloodletting across Africa, especially North, West, Central, and East Africa.

The uncontrolled movement of weapons from the fallen Libyan arsenals, the influx of foreign fighters from elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East, the drive of the Tuereg in North Africa to achieve independence, the rise of Al-Shabaab in East Africa, the spread of Boko Haram from Nigeria to neighbouring countries, and the invasion of Central Africa Republic by Islamist Seleka rebels, have all escalated since the start of the Global War on Terror.

Within DRC, the Islamist Allied Democratic Force[487] (ADF) have established themselves and had, already by 2016, reached out to Boko Haram, Seleka, and Al-Shabaab. It is only a matter of time before IS (Islamic State or ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) reaches further down into Africa. Unconfirmed intelligence has also indicated a desire from Boko Haram to forge closer ties with Seleka.

The Sahel,[488] (and in particular the Taoudeni basin) which is rich in oil, gas, and uranium (and considered by many to be the 'last extraction frontier') is experiencing an escalation of armed activities. Coincidentally, the GWOT has transitioned into this area as French and US forces engage in so-called training missions in the basin, especially in northern Mali and Niger.

Perhaps the warning issued to the Sahel by Libya's Gaddafi is unfolding: "The North of Mali is very rich in mineral resources. If you don't take care, one day the West will come and install themselves permanently in order to exploit your resources." Despite my distaste for Gaddafi, I believe that he made a valid point.



Despite my disdain for Libya's Gaddafi, his warnings held much validity to Africa (photo: Atlantic Sentinel)

I, for one, have watched in near disbelief while western-trained African armed forces, supported by western military forces failed to contain what was allowed to escape the Pandora's Box of terrorism despite astronomical budgets. The so-called 'military partnerships' make for good television viewing but sadly do not result in battlefield gains. The training is good window dressing but a brief look through the window shows an empty room.

South Africa appears to be unaware of the danger that is creeping southwards. Indeed, its lack of action and support to under-siege African governments has opened a door that is currently being exploited by foreign armed forces who view armed conflict and war, not as evils that need to be stopped but as opportunities to exert influence and gain control over resources. This apathy has also made African governments look beyond its shores for military, political, and security assistance, training, and support.

South Africa needs to look within to resolve its problems and then lead the way. Relying on the international community and the UN to aid the continent is a recipe for political and economic disaster. Terms such as 'peacekeeping', 'self-determination', 'sovereignty' and the like are sound-bytes uttered by armchair idealists who have no idea how to convert abstracts to action. While the talking continues behind closed doors and in the media, thousands of Africans of all races are being slaughtered. Many thousands more have fled their own countries to escape conflict, only to die from malnutrition, crime, terrorism, and other human-instigated disasters.

Some international public relations companies such as Bell Pottinger (not content with the massive amount of funding they secretly received from foreign governments to alter and modify existing perceptions on the war in Iraq) took it upon themselves to create as much damage as possible in South Africa.

South Africans from across the colour divide gathered outside Bell Pottinger's head office to protest that company's drive to create animosity and division among South Africans (photo: NDA)

Exposed in early October, 2016 it emerged that (after having received US$540 million to create fake terrorist videos, fake news for Arab news channels, and propaganda videos) Bell Pottinger had encouraged racial tensions and hatred— especially towards people of European descent. It was very clear that their agenda was to permanently damage South Africa. When their duplicity was uncovered, their clients terminated contracts and left. They filed for liquidation in early September 2017.[489] Was this part of a larger 'divide-and-conquer' strategy for South Africa, or was it pure financial greed?

Hopefully, the other PR firms playing the same game will also be exposed.

Auditing firm KPMG South Africa is also trying to rescue its reputation which now lies in tatters. Its role in deception has impacted severely on its professional reputation.[490]

Despite the brinkmanship, gamesmanship, and disinformation, Africa remains in peril.

The South Africa National Defence Force (SANDF) no longer has the ability, capacity, or funding to project positive force or to assist African governments in an ordered, disciplined, effective, and rapid manner. This was spectacularly demonstrated during its ill-fated invasion of land-locked Lesotho, and its missions in Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The SANDF's loss of force projection has also been exploited by the international community and sadly, its peacekeeping missions—which are costing the country billions of Rands— have been tainted with bias, claims of behaviour unbecoming of soldiers, and crimes such as rape, theft, prostitution, child sex, and looting. This has opened the door to foreign armed forces entering Africa and usurping the role South Africa could have played whilst promoting duplicitous agendas.

Officials from the South African government and the UN are now echoing what I was saying in the '90s: 'there can be no economic growth without stability', 'a lack of stability is a breeding ground for crime', 'Africa must make its own choices', 'there can be no peacekeeping if there is no peace' and so forth. Perhaps it just took these officials years to realise that what we were saying was true all along, and that they had been effectively hoodwinked by advisers who wanted the continent to slide even deeper into misery and

chaos. But, giving safe haven to so-called dissidents, deposed dictators, and false refugees may come back to haunt our country.

The South African government has finally begun advocating the view that Africa as a continent should stop looking beyond its borders for help. However, despite these noble words, it has done much to prevent certain sectors of its populace from working and earning a living. Deeds, however, speak louder than words. Several new initiatives will need to be jump-started to replace the beggar's bowl. Africa needs to become self-reliant and strong to survive.

This will not be achieved while the continent's leaders discard accountability in favour of their own economic interests.

As long as foreign economic and political interests encourage conflict and war in Africa, the continent will remain at war with itself.

PR firm Bell Pottinger's Victoria Geoghegan led the company's charge to incite racial hatred in South Africa (Photo www.prweek.com)

51:

Afterword

Both Africa and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the men who served Executive Outcomes so selflessly. It is a debt that can never be repaid. I remain humbled by the loyalty that many of these men still offer me. They are the men who built the reputation of the company.

I also have a duty to those men to ensure that the lies that were spread about them and the company are exposed for the malicious fabrications[491] they are. The story of Executive Outcomes is also their story. I hope I have been able to tell it as they would have liked.

In 2007 I wrote:

> There was a time when I had little to no interest in the misery and chaos that was—and still is spreading across Africa. I have come to realise that any attempt to stem the tide of terror and mayhem will be viewed as 'sinister'—especially by those pursuing alternative agendas for influence, power, resource control, fame, and personal gain. This has not, however, stopped me from thinking how bitterly sad it is that such a potentially mighty and wealthy continent remains in chaos and conflict. Africa ought to be the bread-basket of the world—instead, several of its countries remain basket cases. Where a semblance of democracy and a free market approach have taken hold, it has brought stability, and those economies have shown increased growth.
>
> The company held the belief—and proved—that Africans, regardless of colour or creed, are the only ones who can solve Africa's many problems. Despite that belief having been ridiculed by many when I expressed it more than two decades ago, I still hold it close to my heart. Others, for whom the concept of a strong and powerful Africa is a threat, continue to exploit the ethnic, tribal, and race cards, add fuel to historical antagonisms, and covertly assist and sponsor extremist and other anti-government forces.
>
> I still regularly receive calls from African governments asking if I would be prepared to assist them in resolving their problems. Several governments have asked me to resurrect EO. They have lost all faith in the AU, the UN, the West, and even in South Africa, whose 'peacekeeping missions' have been tainted with gross misconduct, inadequate leadership, poor discipline, intelligence failures,[492] and political partiality. Although I have assisted several African governments with strategy, politics, and security, subsequent to my departure from EO, I have declined becoming involved in ending armed conflicts.
>
> Times have changed and so too, has my answer to them.

That was indeed the case ten years ago. Times have once more changed and my men and I are again assisting African governments under siege. The media continues to play its duplicitous games.

***

Numerous African governments question the South African government's desire to see a peaceful and stable Africa as a result of its hostility towards EO (and more recently towards STTEP)[493]—again acting on advice from duplicitous advisors, non- African governments and the media. As a result, these governments do not trust the South African government or its intentions.

The author, as chairman of STTEP International, and his men, currently serve several African governments

I have come to suspect that those governments who are indeed desirous of peace and economic growth are faced with insurmountable problems ranging from threats of political and economic blackmail and regime-change to foreign-sponsored proxy forces and agit-prop[494] actions. Recently, STTEP warned the SA government that similar actions were underway in this country. These warnings were promptly discarded as 'implausible'.

The extent of the disinformation and lies directed against the company will never fully be known. The vindication gives many of us some comfort, but the damage inflicted can never be undone, and the lives lost are lost forever. I doubt that those who planned and partook in the numerous campaigns against EO find this troubling their consciences.

Executive Outcomes had good men working for it. Some died in service of the company. Most believed in what they were doing, and hoped to make the continent a better place for themselves, their children, and those who are from Africa. These men braved dangers on a daily basis to honour the company's contracts, bring about peace, and protect their colleagues and innocent civilians alike. They saved the lives of thousands of innocent men, women, and children. They are still regarded as heroes by many in Angola, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere.

Those who survived and those who died were falsely accused and maligned by those who chose to manipulate perceptions, either because it was fashionable to do so or because they were willingly propagating a multitude of duplicitous agendas.

To the wives and partners of the men who worked in the company—be proud of what your loved ones achieved against tremendous odds. Although it cannot have been easy for you to live without them, spare a thought for the loneliness they had to endure and the dangers they had to face, often several times a day. Know also that you were never far from their thoughts.

To those children who perceive their fathers as 'mercenaries' who were acting to destabilise the countries they served in—do not believe the lies. Your fathers were giants among men with steel in their veins. They never ran or flinched in the face of danger.

To the governments that continued to trust us, despite the pressure they were placed under, the lies they were fed, and the political blackmail and threats that forced them to expel us from their soil: 'Thank you for your support and for trusting us.'

To the men of Executive Outcomes—those who made it back and those who didn't—I will never forget you. Your sacrifices and loyalty will be remembered forever and I will always be proud to have been associated with you.

Johan Steyl, one of EO's Boeing pilots and his wife, at the EO memorial which was moved from EO's offices in Pretoria. Their names will never be forgotten (Photo johansteylkosmos.blogspot.co.za)

Executive Outcomes: Roll of Honour

Angola: Soyo contract, 1993

B. Fourie 18 March 1993
P. Smith 29 March 1993
C. Taljaard 29 March 1993

Angola: FAA contract: 1993—1996

W. Ross-Smith 11 November 1993
R. van der Merwe Unconfirmed but accepted as 29 March 1994
H. Ndhlovu Unconfirmed but accepted as 29 March 1994
S. Marais Unconfirmed but accepted as 29 March 1994
L. Coetzer 2 April 1994
I. Laubscher 2 April 1994
R. Nitzche 2 April 1994
D. van Tonder 2 April 1994
B. Bezuidenhout 2 April 1994
L. Swart 20 May 1994
L. Bosch 21 July 1994
D. Scheurkogel 21 July 1994 captured presumed killed.
N. Hayes 25 July 1994
P. Dittrich 9 September 1994
H. Ndishisi 13 October 1994
J. Kellerman 5 November 1994
T. Faure 9 March 1995

Sierra Leone: Sierra Leone Army contract: 1995—1997

A. Efraim 22 June 1995
S. Fouche 27 July 1995
P. Breedt 05 October 1995
E. Tushiimbeni 08 February 1996
G. Koekemoer 08 February 1996
13. Shitango 11 March 1996

Forever remembered by their comrades

Appendix A:
The Corporation's Mission

The corporation's mission is to provide:

1. A highly professional and confidential military advisory service to legitimate governments.
2. Sound strategic and tactical military advice.
3. The most professional training packages currently available to armed forces, covering aspects related to :

- Land warfare
- Air warfare
- Sea warfare

4. Peacekeeping (persuasion) services.
5. Advice to armed forces on weaponry selection.
6. Paramilitary services.
7. A comprehensive apolitical service based on confidentiality, integrity, professionalism, and dedication to creating a climate for peace, stability, and foreign investment.

What the corporation can offer

Executive Outcomes (EO) prides itself on its record of success. Employing a highly professional workforce with more than 5 000 man-years of military knowledge, combat, and training experience, the corporation is most probably the largest of its type in the world. Executive Outcomes' record of success is as yet unequalled. It offers:

Training

Executive Outcomes has assisted local and international clients with training packages in the following fields:

- Basic infantry training
- Advanced infantry training
- Artillery training
- Armoured warfare training
- Combat engineer training
- Supporting arms training i.e. signals, logistics
- Integration of arms training
- Specialist weapons training (NATO and East Bloc)
- Combat air patrol (CAP) training with both loose- and fixed-wing aircraft
- Ground air support training

- Leadership training from section leader level to brigade staff level
- Basic and advanced battle handling
- Strategy and tactics
- Heliborne operations
- Sniper training
- Special Forces selection programmes
- Special Forces training for both urban and rural environments
- Clandestine warfare
- Air supply techniques
- Parachute training in static-line deployment, free fall and HALO / HAHO techniques
- Reconnaissance of objectives
- Escape and evasion
- Discretionary warfare

Executive Outcomes does not possess pre-prepared training programmes. Programmes are only compiled once the prospective client has identified the exact desired outcome of the intended course, and Executive Outcomes personnel have conducted a thorough analysis of the threat, terrain, enemy, and tactics. This results in tailor-made training programmes that are appropriate to the client's operational circumstances. Following presentation of a mission-related statement, Executive Outcomes can assure total client confidentiality.

Advice

Executive Outcomes has provided, and still provides clients with advice on aspects such as:

1. Developing strategies
2. Training subjects/ programmes
3. Monitoring trainers
4. Restructuring programmes
5. Weapon and weapon platform selection
6. Tactics

Equipment

The approach the corporation has adopted is as follows:

1. The client advises EO of the exact problem. In a joint think-tank, solutions to counter the problem are generated, and if equipment is necessary, EO will identify possible equipment solutions.
2. EO gathers all relevant information on the selected equipment and makes specific recommendations to the client, based on:

- Performance and flexibility

- Cost.

If the client accepts EO's recommendation, EO will secure a quotation, which, if accepted by the client, will then be processed. EO has learnt that this approach is most beneficial to clients as it prevents unnecessary equipment purchases.

Major projects to date

The following are examples of major projects the corporation has been tasked with:

1. The training of South African Special Forces operatives in:

- Covert intelligence gathering
- Counter-espionage
- Covert operations

2. Planning, establishing, training, and equipping a covert counter-crime unit for a major multi-national client.
3. Securing and holding oil installations in Africa to enable the recovery of equipment by the client under extremely hazardous conditions.
4. Planning, establishing, training, and equipping an organisation established to counter white-collar crime for a major product supplier.
5. Training of market-intelligence executives in the gathering of market-related information and marketing warfare.
6. Restructuring and retraining special operations units for a major African client.
7. Restructuring and retraining an African defence force.
8. Preventing a coup d'état.
9. Training discretionary warfare teams for a DEA.
10. Planning, training and executing a successful hostage release operation.

Conclusion

Since 1989 Executive Outcomes has proved itself in the specialist security market. Providing a comprehensive and professional service, the corporation has experienced an above-average growth and has been able to assist clients in ensuring that desired outcomes are met.

EO is a proven leader in the marketplace, both nationally and internationally. Executive Outcomes is a dynamic professional corporation that can be relied on to give a highly professional service at all times.

Appendix B: Counting the cost

Much has been written about the excessively high costs allegedly paid by the governments that contracted Executive Outcomes. Some have said that the company's services were too expensive. Others claimed that the UN and the international community could do whatever Executive Outcomes did—but for much less money.

Angola

Organisation	Cost	Result
Executive Outcomes	Soyo: US$40 000 (approx)–fees paid by Sonangol and oil companies.	Oil companies recove of dollars' worth of eq Oil production resum
Executive Outcomes	FAA Contract 1993–1997: US$60 million (approx)–fees paid by MPLA government.	FAA defeated UNITA battlefield. UNITA was forced to negotiating table. MPLA regained diam and onshore facilities
SADF	US$1 billion per year in Namibia alone. US$30 million per month (estimated) in Angola. US$80 million per year given to UNITA in aid/weapons. Costs carried by RSA tax-payers.	SADF/UNITA were u secure a military victc UNITA's control over fields and fuels prolon Elephant herds were by SADF/UNITA to s SADF involvement co approximately 19 yea
CIA	US$15–20 million per year from 1986 in covert aid to UNITA.	Indiscernible
United Nations	US$l, 5 billion since implementation of Lusaka Accords in 1993.	No cease-fire. MPLA/ resumed hostilities.

Below are some basic comparative costs on Executive Outcomes' projects that became known to the media and the general public. The government or UN figures used were obtained from the relevant Internet sites.

Note: The final communiqué of a meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers in August 1989 in Canberra stated that South African destabilisation had thus far caused the deaths of about 1.5 million people in the states neighbouring South Africa, as well as damages valued at US$45 billion. The cost of the SADF's war in an Angola was largely hidden beneath a cloak of secrecy, and SADF equipment losses have never been revealed.

Indonesia (hostage release operation)

Organisation	Cost	Result
Executive Outcomes	US$300 thousand (approximately).	Hostages freed exc killed.
British government	Unknown	Nil
US government	Unknown	Nil
UN	Unknown	Nil
IRC	Unknown	Nil

Rwanda (quotation only)

Organisation	Cost	Result
Executive Outcomes	Budgeted US$100 million for 6 months.	Rejected by UN expensive'.
US Military Operations *Distant Runner* and *Support Hope*	US$147.8 million for 6 months.	Rescued 148 An 82 'others'. Did genocide. Genocide of hun thousands of civ
UN	US$600 million for 6 months (approx).	Genocide of hun thousands of civ
France	Unknown	Unknown
Belgium	Unknown	Unknown

Sierra Leone

Organisation	Cost	Result
Executive Outcomes	US$31 million per year (approx)—much of it still outstanding.	RUF defeated on the b Thousands of civilian l Child soldiers demobil Government regained diamond fields and rut Food convoys travelled safety. RUF signed a cease-fir returned home. Free a elections were held.
United Nations (UNAMSIL)	US$600 million per year (2001).	Military coup ousted el president. RUF overran Freetown Thousands of civilians maimed. Damage to infrastructu at untold millions of d Thousands became ref UN rated UNAMSIL as successful' UN mission
International Community	US$60 million per year spent on maintaining refugees outside Sierra Leone.	Thousands of people p dying of malnutrition.
World Food Programme and other UN agencies and NGOs	US$ unknown	Unknown

Appendix C:
Companies associated with Executive Outcomes

Much has been written about the 'sinister' group of companies associated with Executive Outcomes. In reality there was nothing untoward about them. Like any business, EO's first aim was to grow and diversify, and its second was to provide employment for South African ex-combatants who had served with the SADF, the police, and the liberation movements.

It began with Executive Outcomes cc (later Pty Ltd), which gave rise to the formation of Strategic Resource Corporation (Pty) Ltd (SRC), which became the holding company. Further companies with different lines of business followed. They were:

- Executive Outcomes Ltd (in the UK).
- Advanced Communications Systems (Pty) Ltd. Based in South Africa, it held a 50% stake in a UK-based company with the same name, and provided rural telephony, VSAT networks and satellite communications.
- Shibata Ltd. Based in Europe, it worked in the fields of detection, clearance, and destruction of landmines and unexploded ordnance. SRC held a 50% stake in the company.
- Aquanova Ltd. A Zambian-based company that worked in the fields of water exploration and drill siting, and drilling, testing, and equipping of boreholes. SRC held a 33% stake.
- Ibis Ltd (initially trading as Capricorn Air). This air charter company operated a fleet of Boeing 727s, King Airs, helicopters, and an executive jet. SRC held a 10% stake.
- Stuartmill International (Pty) Ltd. Based in Bloemfontein, it operated in the field of medical services and supplied medical products. SRC held a 20% stake..
- Gemini Video Productions cc was a video production company based in Pretoria. SRC held a 100% stake.
- AA Designs cc. Based in Pretoria, it dealt with high technology computer and electronic design. SRC held a 50% stake.
- Saracen (Pty) Ltd. A Pretoria-based company that specialised in providing high- quality security services to government and corporate clients. SRC held a 50% stake.
- Applied Electronic Services cc. A Pretoria-based company that provided equipment and training in the field of industrial counter-espionage. SRC held a 50% stake.
- OPM (Pty) Ltd. A Pretoria-based company that provided special investigative assistance and risk analysis. SRC held a 50% stake.
- Steel Pact (Pty) Ltd. Based in Johannesburg, it provided a wide range of equipment for military and civilian applications for government and corporate clients. SRC held a 20% stake.

• Bridge International (Pty) Ltd. A business-development company based in

Pretoria and Luanda. Its main fields of operation were in reconstruction and development, education and training, and agricultural services. Owned 100% by SRC.
• Transafrica Logistics (Pty) Ltd. A Pretoria-based company that worked as a logistical purchase office, importer and exporter, and customs clearing agent for the SRC group of companies and private corporations. SRC owned a 50% stake.
• Corporate Alliance (Pty) Ltd. A Pretoria-based company that worked in adult education throughout Africa. SRC had a 100% stake.

When I left Executive Outcomes, I gave my shares in the group to my fellow directors but never exonerated them from having to pay back money used to establish the companies—or sponsor initial contracts.

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Notes

[←1]

EDITOR'S NOTE: …and it has been an absolute pleasure. I think this book is essential reading for every person in South Africa!

[←2]
Known as ‘apartheid’

[←3]

During World War II, General Clark commanded the United States Fifth Army, and later the 15th Army Group. He commanded the US Fifth Army in its capture of Rome in June 1944

[←4]

I later joined the regular army, known as the ‘permanent force’ or PF

[←5]

A term used by Afrikaans speakers for those of English descent. The Boers coined the term during the Boer War when the lily-white English soldiers suffered severe sunburn on their necks from the blazing African sun

[←6]

Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, more commonly known as the MPLA

[←7]

The People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola

[←8]

Now Democratic Republic of Congo

[←9]

PLAN was initially formed as the South West African Liberation Army (SWALA) by SWAPO in 1962

[←10]

Although it was considered by many to be a Marxist-Leninist inspired organisation, MPLA considered itself an African socialist movement. Later, supported by the Soviet Union and her allies, it was firmly labelled as a Marxist-Leninist organisation

[←11]

Later renamed Huambo

[←12]

Demolitions, water purification and supply, base maintenance and so forth

[←13]

Infantry battalion

[←14]

The R1 was the South African derivative of the famous FN assault rifle

[←15]

The infantry protection team initially deployed on either side of the sweep team, but due to the undergrowth this made movement tiring, noisy, and cumbersome. The drill was that they would remain in their MPVs until they were required to engage a PLAN ambush

[←16]
A rank equivalent to Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col)

[←17]

See http://eebenbarlowsmilitaryandsecurityblog.blogspot.co.za/2017/02/rooiplaas-paratroopers-community.html

[←18]

Rocket-propelled grenade- a Soviet manufactured, shoulder -launched anti-tank rocket

[←19]

Casualty evacuation

[←20]

Honoris Crux—South Africa's highest award for bravery

[←21]

It was an honour and privilege to serve under Commandant (later Colonel) Deon Ferreira, who in my opinion ranks alongside Colonel Jan Breytenbach as one of the most able and competent battalion commanders the SADF ever had

[←22]

In later years, this changed as UNITA realised they could get more value from the SADF than from SWAPO/PLAN

[←23]

https://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0904/090437.html

[←24]

A detailed account of 32 Battalion's actions can be found in Piet Nortje's two-volume work, The Terrible Ones, published by Zebra Press, 2012. Nortje compiled this work from the unit's official war-diary accounts

[←25]

Peter Stiff was a well-known author, historian and publisher. He passed away on 27 April 2016 after a short illness

[←26]

The grenades for the M79 launcher. We invariably referred to them as ‘bombs’ or ‘rounds’

[←27]

High frequency—used as our rear-link to our HQ

[←28]
Very high frequency—used as our tactical ground-to-air radio

[←29]
Someone of European origin

[←30]

Mark later went on to remain with the Reconnaissance Wing

[←31]

Bundu-bashing is a colloquial African term for driving cross-country

[←32]

Russian off-road 4×4 military vehicle

[←33]

Soviet manufactured shoulder launched surface-to-air missile

[←34]

He considered himself more South African than American

[←35]

Breytenbach, J: The Buffalo Soldiers, Galago, 2002, P241

[←36]

Although PLAN was the armed wing of SWAPO, many people generally only referred to them as ‘SWAPO’

[←37]

Breytenbach, J: The Buffalo Soldiers, Galago, 2002, P241

[←38]

If I recall correctly, he came back to us as a colonel

[←39]

Every man carried his own medical supplies which would be used to treat him if he was wounded

[←40]

Known as ‘moonshine operations’

[←41]

Afrikaans term for tracks

[←42]

Anti-aircraft artillery

[←43]

Anti-aircraft

[←44]

A slang term dating from the mid to late nineteenth century, meaning soldiers. It was often used in the context ‘where the army goes the pong goes’

[←45]

Term generally used to indicate strike aircraft as opposed to loose-wings (helicopters)

[←46]

We later learnt that between 2 500 and 3 000 troops had been killed that day.

[←47]

Many years later, I met the PLAN detachment commander who told me they had no wish to engage in a follow-up operation of, what they mistakenly thought, was a large South African force

[←49]

http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/car-bomb-explodes-outside-air-force-headquarters

[←50]

Gerrie Bornman worked for the Directorate of Covert Collection—Military Intelligence Division

[←51]

I knew that the South African government would never have supported the Maoist-inspired UNITA had it really been serious about fighting communism, and wondered what deals the politicians were cutting for themselves behind the scenes. I did not voice my opinion; instead I chose to serve the Constitution and not our political masters. The fact that I disagreed with the war did not stop me from being a soldier.

[←52]

I had qualified as an EOD operator sometime in early 1980

[←53]

The South African Republic that had fought the British during the Anglo-Boer War

[←54]

Extract from Personal SADF File, dated 14 Feb 1985: Colonel L E Barlow.

[←55]

Extract from Personal SADF File, dated 29 Nov 1982: Colonel L E Barlow

[←56]

Then still known as Rhodesia

[←57]

It was, even at that stage, very clear that the ANC and its allies were far better at exploiting the informational environment than what the National Party was

[←58]

6 Reconnaissance Commando comprised mainly ex-Rhodesian soldiers that had left Rhodesia (now renamed ‘Zimbabwe’) and relocated to South Africa

[←59]

In 1994, during the Premiership of John Major, Mugabe was bestowed an honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath by the Queen for his services to liberate Zimbabwe. This honour entitled him to use the letters KCB, but not to use the title "Sir." In June 2008, Mugabe was stripped of his honorary knighthood along with his UK awarded honorary degrees.

[←60]

A derogatory term used for those from English-speaking backgrounds. The term refers to the sunburnt necks suffered by British soldiers during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)

[←61]

I would later learn that Reutech had immediately taken the matter up with government ministers, and as they were paying for my entire trip, the DCC was ‘ordered’ to let me go as initially planned

[←62]

My cover story was that I was an ex-SADF combat engineer and had been appointed as a ‘Product Engineer’ by Reutech several months before

[←63]

Midnight Express was a film about a young man who was imprisoned in one of Turkey's notorious jails

[←64]

Many years later I was able to obtain a copy of my military records. The Reutech letter had been removed from my personnel file

[←65]

A town in northern Botswana

[←66]

Talent spotting is a process whereby potential agents are identified

[←67]

My own past experience had taught me that soldiers on the ground had to contend with vastly different pictures to those painted by intelligence officers

[←68]

At the time of revision, I realised that the West's concept of so-called Foreign Internal Defence was remarkably hypocritical. The West could invade, topple governments, and strike any target anywhere if it was suspected that terrorists were being harboured. South Africa was condemned and vilified at every opportunity. This alone ought to have been a warning for the many South Africans who believed—and still believe—that the West will come to their aid

[←69]

At that time, this amounted to roughly US$5 000

[←70]

Many years later, I met Barry Gilder—then serving as the director of South Africa's newly-reformed foreign espionage branch—and told him that R20 000 had been deemed too expensive to kill him. He was shocked that I even knew where he had been hiding in Gaberone

[←71]

In later years, I would be publicly blamed for this incident. The origin of this piece of disinformation was a failed and dishonest British diplomat who was apparently also an agent-of-influence for UNITA

[←72]

The leader of Libya.

[←73]

British foreign intelligence service

[←74]

Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti—the main security agency for the Soviet Union from 1954 until its break-up in 1991.

[←75]

Counter Intelligence, Operations

[←76]

What was even more astonishing was that the ANC was considered a terrorist movement by the very people supporting them and wishing to get them into power

[←77]

The primary US intelligence service known as the Central Intelligence Agency

[←78]

This would take the form of an early morning fender bender while she was on her way to work. The person responsible would assist her and there would be virtually no damage to her car or injuries to her person

[←79]

He didn't mention that he knew she worked for the US government

[←80]

Placing an agent on ice was essentially putting him/her to sleep with the view to reactivating them at a later date

[←81]

Nico initially served as an NCO in the SAEC. He would later be commissioned into the Citizen Force as an officer. The Citizen Force was a reserve force of the SADF made up of soldiers who had served in the armed forces but who had become civilians. They were frequently called up to do a three-month stint in uniform

[←82]

Armscor was effectively a subsidiary of the SADF and its research-and-development and procurement operations were financed by the defence budget

[←83]

The Soviet Union's Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopanosti was originally established as a state security committee. Its primary duties were to gather intelligence in other nations, conduct counter-intelligence, maintain the secret police, the KGB military corps, and the border guards, suppress internal resistance, and conduct electronic espionage. The KGB also used propaganda to enforce Soviet morals and promote Soviet ideology. The agents in this department made sure that the public only saw state-approved information. See http://www.coldwar.org/articles/50s/kgb.asp.

[←85]

Special Air Service

[←86]

Irish Republican Army

[←87]

Steven, Stewart, The Spymasters of Israel, p85–92, Hodder and Staunton, London, 1981

[←88]

Kalugin, O, Spymaster, Smith Gryphon Limited, 1994

[←89]

An early generation British surface to air missile

[←90]

A US designed and manufactured surface-to-air missile that had proved its worth in the proxy war between the US and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan

[←91]

Although I became a member of CCB, I was not a Special Forces operator. There was and still is a vast difference between Special Forces operators and those who have worked in the field of special operations

[←92]

These were known as ‘salesmen’—a rather strange term for operatives

[←93]

The pension, as promised, was never paid out to most operatives.

[←94]

Verster had given me the undertaking that all self-generated funds would be paid back to me as long as I could prove that they had been used to support CCB operations. I believed him

[←95]

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-04-24/Debate-1.html

[←96]

Through the years, several people would claim that they had been founder members of Executive Outcomes. They were all lying

[←97]

A trusted intermediary that can facilitate the exchange of information/equipment between the agent and the agent handler/ operative. Although aware of his/her role, they do not know the true identities of those they are acting for or on behalf of

[←98]

At that time it was fashionable for Western governments to provide aid to terrorist organisations intent on overthrowing the South African National Party government. This attitude changed in later years when those same governments themselves became the victims of terrorism. Attempts to destabilise South Africa post 1994, regardless of the government in power, have remained firmly in place

[←99]

Misappropriating funds

[←100]

At that time, the London underground rail system had very few cameras and therefore there was very little danger that an assassination would be caught on camera

[←101]

A micro submachine gun

[←102]

Years later, many of the European governments who so vociferously criticised this act implemented their own version of it to arrest and hold persons suspected of terrorism

[←103]

It later transpired that Lubowski had been an SADF agent

[←104]

The Broederbond was a secretive club of Afrikaner would-be leaders of South Africa. Its mission was to ensure that anyone who was not part of their 'language, culture and religious standing' would be viewed as unsuitable material for any senior position in government, its bureaucracy, or the SADF. It was the Broederbond that had fine-tuned the British colonial system of segregation and called it apartheid.

[←105]

We often said that if ever we were kicked out the door, nobody would want to hire a ‘second-hand soldier’ i.e. a used soldier

[←106]

Also known as Irangate, Contragate, or the Iran-Contra scandal. Senior US officials had secretly sold arms to Iran (then under an international arms embargo) and used the profits to fund the Contra rebels in Nicaragua while simultaneously trying to release several US hostages held in Iran

[←107]

Mmabathu was the capital of the former Bophuthatswana homeland

[←108]

Members of the SAAF choir were known as ‘Canaries’

[←109]

Kratz was a former 32 Bn company commander that I had known from my time with the battalion

[←110]

Simon Mann would later claim that he was a founding member of Executive Outcomes and go on to achieve his own fame as a failed coup plotter

[←112]

By then known as FAA, and no longer as FAPLA

[←113]

Previously known as ‘Zaire’

[←114]

What many South Africans are unaware of is that the newly installed Angolan government under the leadership of Augustino Neto approached South Africa to ask for assistance in rebuilding its economy. South Africa declined the invitation and instead chose to intervene militarily.

[←115]

An Afrikaans term for ‘ crowbar’

[←116]

Ironically, no mention was made of the ANC's training areas and support in Angola

[←117]

Spyker is an Afrikaans term for ‘nail’

[←118]

The battles around Cuito Cuanavale resulted in both tactical and operational victories for the South African forces.

However, the South Africans failed to exploit the informational value of these victories and this ultimately culminated in Cuito Cuanavale being viewed as a strategic defeat by South Africa's detractors. The reality was very different

[←119]

Again, South Africa failed to exploit the informational environment and handed the initiative to the Cubans who made very sure they manipulated the international media in their favour

[←120]

Years later, many books written on the siege of Cuito Cuanavale would continue to claim it to have been a SADF defeat

[←121]

Now ‘Democratic Republic of Congo’

[←122]

The UNITA stronghold close to Caprivi in the south-east Angola

[←123]

Cabinda is a small oil-rich enclave, north of Angola. It is considered Angolan territory despite this claim having been disputed by several political movements there

[←124]

Phil was an ex-32 Battalion Reconnaissance Wing member. He went on to later be commissioned as an officer in the Engineers

[←125]

Harry was an ex-Special Forces member who had later served in 101 Battalion

[←126]

They were all ex-4 Reconnaissance Regiment (seaborne) men

[←127]

GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) is a British intelligence and security organisation responsible for providing signals intelligence (SIGINT) and information validation to the British government and the UK armed forces. In the execution of its duties, it also monitors radio and telephone traffic into and out of the UK

[←128]

I would later discover that he was referring to Isaias Samakuva, who was at that time based in London as UNITA's official ambassador to Europe. It was strange that a rebel group actually had diplomatic status

[←129]

"Don't fucking shoot—it's us!" in Afrikaans

[←130]

The capital city of Namibia

[←131]

Jamba lay to the south-east of Soyo. To get to Jamba, the men would have to move through hundreds of kilometres of very hostile terrain held by UNITA—and then attack UNITA forces of several thousand men. Only Capraro could explain how they would do that

[←132]

Now known as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

[←133]

A Soviet-made 30mm automatic grenade launcher

[←134]

I would, at a later date, learn that UNITA had repaid South Africa with diamonds, precious woods, and ivory for the assistance and support it received. Where these commodities disappeared to remains a mystery

[←135]

The third man, Cornel Taljaard, was killed in a UNITA ambush en route to Sumba

[←136]

Not to be confused with Colonel JAB Swart, Jake Swart was the General Officer Commanding Special Forces

[←137]

De Klerk was the last white-serving president of South Africa

[←138]

Source unknown

[←139]

Now officially Namibia

[←140]

At that time, the South African currency (USD1 = R6. 25) had not yet entered free-fall

[←141]

Rest and recuperation

[←142]

Many years later, I met the PLAN commander in Windhoek, and we discussed our operation and their reaction at length

[←143]

Chief of the Angolan armed forces.

[←144]

The media would later falsely claim that EO owned the equipment and was therefore able to attack or invade any African government with the equipment we ‘possessed’

[←145]

A Johannesburg daily newspaper

[←146]

One of the self-governing homelands the South African government had established within the Republic's borders.

[←147]

Cabo Ledo was an old air force base used extensively by the Cubans during the earlier years of conflict in Angola.

[←148]

The official designation of UNITA's military forces

[←149]

This was in the days before email. Very few ex-servicemen had personal fax machines

[←150]

Council for Scientific and Industrial Research

[←151]

Operation Cloud Cover

[←152]

Pomfret is an old asbestos mining town on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. It was here that the National Party government of South Africa dumped 32 battalion after it had loyally served the SADF—and the National Party's policies. Today, it remains a place of poverty with little to no hope for its residents who remain largely Portuguese speaking

[←153]

An obscene gesture where the thumb is placed between the forefinger and the middle finger and directed at someone

[←154]

A well respected ex-101 Bn commander who by then was serving in counter-intelligence

[←155]

On 20 April 2017, I published an opportunity for ex-MI officers to come forward anonymously and tell me what they had been instructed to do to Executive Outcomes and by whom. Several of them did. I undertook not to name and shame those who came forward. The phone calls made to the families of EO members was confirmed as one of their plans to force men to resign and return home.

[←156]

‘Oom’ is an Afrikaans term of endearment and respect. The English translation is ‘Uncle’

[←157]

Capricorn Systems was later renamed ‘Ibis Air’

[←158]

Also sometimes incorrectly referred to as the Mi-17, this twin turbine, multi-role helicopter would soon prove to be ideally suited to our purposes. Initially designed as an airborne workhorse, it could carry 30 combat-ready troops flying on a single engine if the other was lost. It could also perform a vast array of missions including air assault operations to attack a point of penetration, reinforce units in contact, or disrupt counter-attacks. Other mission designs included attack, direct air support, electronic warfare, airborne early warning, casevac, and search and rescue. To avoid confusion, the designation Mi-17 is used throughout the text

[←159]

The capital city of Namibia

[←160]
Steal

[←161]

In the Limpopo district, near Thabazimbi

[←162]

National Intelligence Service

[←163]

Unlike its military counterpart, the NIS was responsible for the covert collection of information that had to do with threats or perceived threats from beyond South Africa's borders. While MI and its affiliates were supposed to confine themselves to foreign military matters, NIS had a far wider brief

[←164]

State Security Council

[←165]

In attempts to give credence to their false reporting, some in the media would later claim that Kallie was one of EO's 'founder members'

[←166]

At that time, an Afrikaans-speaking South African was automatically labelled an ‘apartheid’ supporter despite the fact that most Angolans had no clue of what apartheid really meant

[←167]

Known as Fortaleza de Sao Miguel

[←169]

Barlow, E, Composite Warfare, The Conduct of Successful Ground Force operations in Africa, 30°South Publisher, 2016

[←170]

It was clear to me that De Matos and Itha had taken note of my suggestions and incorporated some of them into their plans

[←171]

The so-called counter-insurgency scenario does not have a single centre of gravity but rather a trinity consisting of the insurgent leadership, the people, and the finances. See http://eebenbarlowsmilitaryandsecurityblog.blogspot.co.za/2010/03/misjudging-centre-of-gravity.htm

[←172]

At that time, Gush was a director of Anglo American Corporation

[←173]

Known as double agents in intelligence speak

[←174]

Formerly 5 Reconnaissance Regiment. President de Klerk had disbanded the Special Forces and attempted to transform them into a parachute unit

[←176]

Booysen was a busy man because he was also active in obvious MI front companies, African Logistics Suppliers (where he was exports director) and Dure Persec. Assisting him in the latter company was a WA van Deventer (chairman).It was suggested that both Booysen and Van Deventer were closely associated with Sonel, another front company established to provide cover for CI operatives at a cost of several million Rands to the taxpayer

[←178]

Elements of the 16 Brigade, after having been trained at Longa, were redeployed to Dondo. Their position there would act as a threat to any UNITA intentions on Luanda. There they were joined by additional armour elements that would receive some EO training there

[←179]

As a RDF, it would be used to protect, defend and respond to any UNITA actions in and around Saurimo

[←180]

The Soviet BMP-2 is a tracked armoured infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) which first made an appearance in the Warsaw Pact armies in the early 1980s. Designed as a light amphibious combat vehicle, it soon proved its cross-country abilities in the Angolan bush. Its low silhouette and quick-fire 30mm turret-mounted cannon provided a perfect boost to the shock effect of the FAA's mechanised assaults. With a three-man crew and seating for seven infantrymen in the rear, it was able to deliver fighting men close to enemy positions and provide them with good fire-support

[←181]

A Portuguese term for a person of mixed race

[←182]

At the time of writing another conflict is raging in the Middle East, and spreading to Europe. The voice of international outrage that is now heard over relatively few civilian casualties quietly ignored the hundreds of thousands of dead and displaced during the conflict in Angola

[←183]

The diamond rich areas under UNITA control

[←184]

As Xingi lay on the planned advance route to Cafunfu, it was decided to confuse UNITA by dislocating their HQ at Muhango.

[←185]

UNITA's northern logistical supply route

[←186]

The Angolan state-run diamond company

[←187]
TAAG

[←188]

Sometimes known as Quicama

[←189]

Not too long after that, Meyer switched his political allegiance and joined the ANC

[←190]

Long-serving South African Minister of Foreign Affairs

[←191]

Some reports later stated that they had been taken to Cafunfu

[←192]

UNITA's military forces. We however usually just referred to them as 'UNITA'

[←193]

I saw this as an attempt to weaken South African's security establishment and increase the vulnerability of the country

[←194]

Afrikaner resistance movement

[←195]

Afrikaans term for ‘barbeque’

[←196]

This intelligence was supplemented by prisoner-of-war (POW) interrogation reports when the FAA made them available to us

[←197]

This internal South African operation was later named Operation Marion

[←198]

From an extract of a UNAVEM II report date unknown

[←199]

Subsequently renamed ‘Johannesburg International Airport’ and now known as ‘O R Tambo International Airport’

[←200]

Although the attack on N'dalatando had been planned for when the EO men were on forced leave, several delays on FAA's part resulted in the attack taking place later. As a result some of the EO men had been engaged by FAA to assist in the operation

[←201]

I would later learn from Johann Smith that this tactic was being encouraged and indeed, driven from South Africa

[←202]

Chinese mafia

[←203]

We assumed he meant ‘RPD’, a Soviet manufactured light machine gun

[←204]

Stratcom was an acronym for ‘strategic communications’ (a hangover from the apartheid days) used to denote a disinformation operation

[←205]

The Mi-17 has a 500kg magnesium gearbox. Magnesium burns rather well.

[←206]

The MiG-23, NATO codename ‘Flogger’ was a third-generation Soviet designed and built fighter-cum-ground attack aircraft that could be fitted with a host of different missiles and guns

[←207]

Close to Chicuza on the way to the next UNITA strategic logistical base at Alto Chicapa

[←208]

When Hennie initially learnt that the force would be using BMPs, he was furious. He told me that they were ‘crap’ and ‘useless’

[←209]

Named after the tough Ratel (Afrikaans for honey-badger), this six-wheeled vehicle had earned its reputation during the SADF's numerous incursions into Angola

[←210]

The knife, along with my computer, was stolen when my home was burgled (See Introduction)

[←211]

Also nicknamed ‘Stalin organ’ and/or ‘red-eye’ by South African troops

[←212]

The Soviet-designed B-10 (sometimes referred to as a B-12) recoilless rifle is a single-shot, tripod-mounted 82mm anti- tank rocket launcher which proved to be highly effective against FAA combat vehicles. The weapon has no recoil as the flame and superheated gasses from the projectile are expelled out of the back of the launcher. This back-blast gives the weapon a tell-tale signature at the point of launch. This made the UNITA crews vulnerable to detection, but despite this drawback, it remained a devastating short-range antitank weapon with an effective deployment range of 1 000 metres

[←213]

The US designed 106mm recoilless rifle is an equally devastating anti-tank weapon system. Often mounted on the ubiquitous Willys Jeep or fired from a tripod, it is capable of firing a fin-stabilised 106mm anti-tank projectile over a range of more than 1 000 metres. UNITA had several of these systems in their arsenal, having received them from both South Africa and the US. Like the B-10 crews, the gun-crews, would be vulnerable to detection

[←214]

…in which I had said UNITA would not resist with a strong defensive battle

[←215]

The speed at which the ‘bush telegraph’ operated was astonishing. The povo knew that the EO men would not harm them and they knew exactly which vehicles to stop and air their complaints to

[←216]

In 2017, I met a security guard in Centurion, Pretoria. Born and bred in Zaire, he had been a member of UNITA in the Cafunfu surrounds. He confirmed that two weeks prior to the fall of Cafunfu, nightly flights from South Africa were still supplying them in return for diamonds

[←217]

Twin and four-barrelled anti-aircraft guns

[←218]

Several months prior, General de Matos had requested I place an order for Ratels with Armscor. Armscor had refused to sell Ratels to ‘communists’.

[←219]

No relation to Colonel Nevis

[←220]

Springbok Park is in Pretoria

[←221]

The area where combat and support vehicles position themselves either for an overnight stay or to regroup and replenish logistics is known as a harbour area

[←222]

It was common practise to remove weapons from the bodies of the enemy where possible as it was assumed many would ‘play dead’ and attack our men as they swept past. Nick’s action most probably saved several EO lives

[←223]

Some places on maps were designated according to their height above sea level. The explosion was so large that it took several metres off the top of the hill

[←224]

A dumb bomb is an unguided bomb. The FAA did not, at that time, have laser-guided bombs in their arsenal

[←225]

Afrikaans term for ‘beat him up’

[←226]

Close enough to pose a threat to 16 Brigade's area of influence or to use as a marshalling point for a counter-attack on Cafunfu

[←227]

It would not have taken UNITA long to start using the diamonds at Lubalo to fund weapons and equipment purchases

[←228]

Sonel was an SDCI front company

[←229]

Helgaard Lombaard would feature many years later as a covert operative in the employ of the SA Receiver of Revenue (SARS). His role was apparently to investigate cases of tax evasion. He, and another SARS official, were implicated in the on-going saga to have South Africa's then Minister of Finance, Pravin Ghordan suspended (Mail & Guardian, 20 May, 2016)

[←230]

Worthless information.

[←231]

Resupply

[←232]

At no stage during EO's engagement in Angola did the company ever employ more than 500 men

[←233]

Hooper, J., Bloodsong!, Collins, 2002, P214

[←234]

After 40 years in the media, Boyle is now a senior researcher at the University of Cape Town's Land & Accountability Research Centre (LARC).

[←235]

Neither FAA nor the Home Guard were issued with R-5 assault rifles

[←236]

https://mg.co.za/article/1989-10-20-row-policeman-tells-of-sb-hit-squad

[←237]

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31056814

[←238]

At the time of revising this book, van der Westhuizen was working for a Johannesburg-based arms company and apparently, still maintaining a close relationship with the intelligence services.

[←239]

The Hechler & Koch G-3 rifle (also referred to as the R-2) was used by the South African Marine Corps and Air Force as a standard rifle. In the mid-1980s, it was replaced by the R-4 assault rifle.

[←240]

In June, 1995

[←241]

https://mg.co.za/article/1995-06-02-sas-arms-dealing-underworld

[←242]

Approximately 300 kilometres south of Saurimo

[←243]

The names the povo gave rivers often differed from the official river names. I assumed that Hennie was referring to the Cuilo River

[←244]

4 and 5 Reconnaissance Regiments were located at Langebaan and Phalaborwa respectively, and not Durban

[←245]

I expressed my disquiet to Generals de Matos and Itha about the UN prohibiting a legitimate government from having an intelligence organisation. Stupidity has seldom reached such heights

[←246]

Cleary was feeding disinformation to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. UNITA had apparently tasked Cleary to encourage Mbeki to take immediate and direct action against EO and ensure its speedy departure from Angola

[←247]

I had served as Willem's second-in-command while with 32 Battalion.

[←248]

This snub was still a cause for anger in Angola years later. When I met several MPLA politicians in 2007, they told me that the ANC-led government had proven itself ‘unreliable’ and ‘ungrateful’ for the MPLA’s support in having given them safe haven in Angola

[←249]

This was apparently a reference to US registered ATO Cargo Logistics Copt, headquartered in Miami, USA

[←250]

141 passengers and crew were killed. TSA has subsequently closed down

[←251]

In 1999, Hammond, along with fellow Christian worker Timothy Kellar, was arrested and charged with treason and insurrection by the rebel SPLA in Sudan. They were accused of illegal gun running and were declared undesirables in 1999

[←252]

Hammond again lied. EO never employed Israeli, Portuguese or Brazilian soldiers

[←253]

See Chapter 49

[←254]

Military Professional Resources Inc., started in 1987 by retired Army General Vernon Lewis, has been the recipient of numerous defence-related contracts from the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of State

[←255]

http:// www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unavem_p.htm

[←256]
North-east Frontier Post

[←257]

Muaquesse Border Post

[←258]
See Chapter 38

[←259]

https://www.globalpolicy.org/global-taxes/41606-final-report-of-the-un-panel-of-experts.html

[←260]

Known as the Rwandan genocide

[←261]

Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo

[←262]

Also referred to as the Valentim faction

[←263]

Morocco was a supporter of Savimbi. Several Moroccan Special Forces members were killed by EO when defending Soyo in early 1993

[←264]

According to the ‘Fowler Report’, most of these planes arrived at night and the military cargo was offloaded and then put in bags to try to disguise it as food or clothing

[←265]

Disinformation campaign

[←266]

The Botswana government owns fifteen percent of De Beers, and Anglo the rest

[←267]

Source unknown

[←268]

Although MI was already running an ‘EO desk’, DFA had established a similar desk to coordinate the flow of ‘intelligence’ on EO

[←269]

There was confusion on the identity of the mysterious 'Watson'. The UN identified him as an ex-SADF officer. See UN Security Council's Final Report of the Monitoring Mechanism of Angola Sanctions issued on 21 December 2000 for identity of Watson in this chapter

[←270]

Named after Martin Chungong Ayafor, the Chairman Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone Diamonds and Arms Security Council resolution 1306 (2000).

[←271]

He was arrested in Thailand in 2008 before being extradited in 2010 to the United States to stand trial on terrorism charges after having been accused of intending to smuggle arms to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) for use against US forces

[←272]

http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/22/business/controversy-over-diamonds-made-into-virtue-by-de-beers.html?mcubz=3

[←273]

https://www.icij.org/investigations/makingkilling/conflict-diamonds-are-forever/

[←274]

President of Sierra Leone from 28 November 1985 – 29 April 1992

[←275]

An international association established between Sierra Leone and Liberia (later joined by Guinea) intended to ‘accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural advancement’ of the two countries through ‘active collaboration and mutual assistance in matters of common interest in economic, social, technical, scientific and administrative fields’

[←276]

Served as President of Sierra Leone from 1996 to 1997 and again from 1998 to 2007

[←277]

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was a West African multilateral armed force established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOMOG was a formal arrangement for separate armies to work together. It was largely supported by Nigerian Armed Forces personnel and resources with sub-battalion strength units contributed by other ECOWAS members—Guinea, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and others

[←278]

Krahn is an ethic grouping from Liberia and Ivory Coast

[←279]

Also known as the Mandinka people, they are descendants of the Mali empire

[←280]

He was also endorsed by prominent Liberians abroad such as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia's current president (2017)

[←281]

Taylor would later deny that he had masterminded the rise of the RUF in Sierra Leone although it was well known that he provided arms, training, and even manpower to the rebels

[←282]

Six Burkinabes led by Captain Ndola Wasando were captured by the Sierra Leone Army in Kailahun, and Burkina Faso identification cards were found on several rebel fighters killed during the fighting. There were no suggestions that Burkina Faso was involved at state level, but Taylor and Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso were close friends and the latter had introduced Taylor to Colonel Gaddafi of Libya

[←283]

A slow and unplanned increase in forces, usually the result of a lack of, or a poor strategy

[←284]

A city in the rural west of Sierra Leone

[←285]

It is assumed that Strasser approached the Angolans at more or less this time to enquire about Executive Outcomes

[←286]

MI would falsely claim that Buckingham's offices were a secret 'EO front'. Later, they changed their reporting to claim it was a secret 'MI6 front'.

[←287]

The Taliban also referred to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

[←288]

The Taliban is a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movement. Following the departure of the Soviet forces in 1989, it emerged as one of the most prominent factions of the Afghan Civil War. It controlled most of the country until being overthrown by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001

[←289]

My assessment was proved correct when the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001. Had EO been complicit in training the Taliban, we would most probably have been blamed in later years for supporting an Islamic terrorist movement

[←290]

The DFA and MI would later falsely claim that EO was paid in diamond concessions

[←291]

Maada Bio's comment was essentially a lie but he needed to pacify the population and prevent large-scale panic

[←292]

The captured British officers, who had been working as UN military observers, were named as Lieutenant Colonel IR Howard-Williams, Major John McEwan, Major M Rawlings, Major G Bradley and Major T Lyall. Two were stripped on capture, and another member of the group, a journalist, was forced to carry a rebel commander on his shoulders through a swamp (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/rebels-stripped-and-humiliated-british-officers-1111028.html).

[←293]

Bert was still serving in the SANDF and had to go through the usual resignation process

[←294]

It was interesting to note how the media, particularly in South Africa, continually bemoaned the fact that we were being paid. That many of them were receiving secret, undeclared payments from MI to act as a conduit for disinformation and lies never seemed to bother them

[←295]

The government was led by Strasser's military junta, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), established after they had marched on Freetown and overthrown President of Joseph Momoh's government in 1992

[←296]

Although some men told me they were given Bedford trucks, others told me that they had been given Tata trucks. I will remain with Bedford trucks.

[←297]

This was not the ‘modern weapons and equipment’ the media proclaimed us to have

[←298]

32 Battalion was never part of Special Forces

[←299]

Depending on the pilot's rate of fire selection

[←300]

Moyamba is the capital city of the Moyamba District in Sierra Leone's Southern Province

[←301]

The rebels had indeed been told that the combination of drugs and alcohol would make them invisible to our men

[←302]

http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/14/magazine/sierra-leone-is-no-place-to-be-young.html?mcubz=3

[←303]

The equivalent of an army colonel

[←304]

Ironically, in 2017—at the time of revising the original manuscript—the mainstream media finds itself under increasing attack, especially by the newly elected US president, Donald Trump. This has created a growing concern as they are unsure how to regain a semblance of credibility.

[←305]

The capital and largest city of the diamond-rich Kono District in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone.

[←306]

He probably thought that by referring to the German army as the Wehrmacht instead of the Bundeswehr, we would find more in common with him

[←307]

Jane's Information Group (often referred to as Jane's) is a UK-based publishing company specialising in military, aerospace and transportation topics.

[←308]

RUF rebels frequently received ‘medicine’ from traditional doctors that was supposed to make them invisible. This ‘medicine’ failed the RUF every time they used it

[←309]

The RUF, especially their child ‘soldiers’, were given cocaine and amphetamines as a standard feature of their military training

[←310]

Koidu's official name is Koidu–New Sembehun. Also known as Koidu Town

[←311]

Fred passed away in 2013

[←312]

Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces—the correct designation of the forces. Several of us usually just referred to them as the Sierra Leonean Army.

[←313]

An accidental contact between friendly forces

[←314]

The South African and Mozambican governments signed the so-called Nkomati Accord in 1984. The accord made provision for South Africa to cease support to the anti-government force RENAMO. In turn, the Mozambican government was to expel all ANC members living there. Both parties reneged on the small print. A permanent peace accord was eventually signed in 1992. In 1995, despite a change in government in South Africa, RENAMO were still being covertly supported

[←315]

A council made up of the numerous tribal chiefs from the district and indeed the Eastern Province

[←316]

Venter had already tried to get permission to accompany an EO force in Angola and I had put a stop to that. Although Venter was a well-known war correspondent, a lot of his articles were written for the budding Rambo reader. I believed that such publicity was not in EO's interest.

[←317]

Venter later published a much dramatised account of his time with EO in Sierra Leone. The article appeared in the US magazine, Soldier of Fortune.

[←318]

EO had, during its advance eastwards, briefly occupied the airport at Yengema before commencing with its final push to Koidu

[←319]

Also referred to as ‘Wordu’

[←320]

A standard order given to mortar and artillery crews that they are on target and need to continue firing until told to cease fire

[←321]

In the local Mende language, kamajor means ‘hunter’, so they were well named for the task that lay ahead of them

[←322]

The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS)—commonly referred to as Sandhurst—is located near the village of Sandhurst, approximately 50 kilometres south-west of London

[←323]

In 2009, South Africa's visa-free status to the UK was revoked amid concerns about corruption within the Department of Home Affairs and the ease with which foreign nationals could get South African passports

[←324]

The Sierra Rutile mine was operated by Sierra Rutile Ltd, a company owned by a consortium of US and European investors

[←325]

Bonthe has one of the world's largest known deposits of Titanium ore (rutile), a strategic natural resource

[←326]

Titanium has a high tensile strength to density ratio, is resistant to corrosion, fatigue, and cracking, and can withstand high temperatures. It is used in armour plating, aircraft, and missiles

[←327]

Kangari Hills is a large forest reserve, approximately 85 square kilometres in size, located in the centre of Sierra Leone. As a declared non-hunting area, it was devoid of villages, thus making a perfect safe haven for the rebels

[←328]

TT had, as a young Angolan, initially joined the FNLA. He later became part of 32 Battalion where in later years he gained a commission. He was also awarded the Honoris Crux for bravery during operations

[←329]

Load bearing equipment

[←330]

I would only much later discover Pech's secret agenda

[←331]

Organisation of African Unity. It was established in 1963. It was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by the African Union (AU). Despite its original founding claim, the OAU did little to protect Africans from their own political leaders

[←332]

The fall-out of the DFA's deception and lies would remain for many years. Despite undergoing a name-change to Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), it remains a government department many African governments still distrust deeply

[←333]

Strasser was given a bursary by the UN to study in London. As the UN only paid for one years' study, Strasser was forced to give up his studies and he returned to West Africa after a brief stint as a DJ in a nightclub. At the time of writing (2017), he was a shadow of his former self. Broke and constantly drunk, he lives with his mother. He was never to receive the treatment other deposed heads of state received despite his march on Freetown having laid the foundations for the destruction of the RUF

[←334]
A former UN official

[←335]

Sankoh's objections were in stark contrast to the RUF's use of Guinea as a safe haven

[←336]

In June 1993 UNICEF had been asked to take responsibility for the care of all former child combatants and their psycho-social rehabilitation, the tracing of their families, and their reintegration into family and community. Somewhat lacking in success, this initiative resulted in the formation of Children Associated with the War (CAW), an NGO under the trusteeship of the Catholic Church through the Archbishop of Sierra Leone

[←337]

In 2005, Maada Bio officially became a member of the ruling party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP).

[←338]

Grunberg was present when the initial contract between the NPRC and EO was signed. As Tony Buckingham's financial director, he was tasked with issuing guarantees that EO would be paid

[←339]

Sir Dawda Jawara had by then already been re-elected five times. His government had been deposed by a military coup in 1994. The coup had been conducted by the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). The AFPRC had also banned all political opposition parties.

[←340]

The Gambia is one of only two countries whose self-standing short name for official use begins with the word ‘The’. The other is The Bahamas.

[←341]

This was a blatant lie

[←342]

As the UN's co-called Special Representative to the Great Lakes area, Ajello was remarkably ill informed. His close cooperation with the SA government in Mozambique appeared to point to the source of his 'intelligence'

[←343]

1 The second largest city in Sierra Leone, Bo is located approximately 250 km from Freetown in the Southern Province.

Conveniently, the province borders Liberia, where the RUF was receiving training from South Africans under the auspices of Liberia's 'Presidential Guard'. It was also a conduit for Sierra Leone's illegally mined diamonds to South Africa and elsewhere

[←344]

Joint SLA/EO operations had by then effectively sealed off the infiltration/exfiltration routes from the district into Liberia

[←345]

Located approximately ten kilometres from the town of Kenema, the area consists of mainly forest habitat with scattered savanna and wetlands. It covers approximately 150 km².

[←346]

I was reliably later told that Talif Deen and Dimitri Titov (Cleary's 'man' in the UN) were close friends

[←347]

Established in 1980, GJW Government Relations was created by Wilf Weeks and Andrew Gifford. It was a political lobbying company that boasted immediate access to UL government ministers in return for cash. We certainly had no affiliation with it

[←348]

Queane is now married to Niek du Toit

[←349]
See Chapter 40

[←350]

Our force levels in Sierra Leone differed from what was generally published. Included in our 250 men were logistics, medical, communications, and other specialists deployed in both South Africa and Sierra Leone. The force levels in Sierra Leone never exceeded 200 men

[←351]

Collins was a British Army officer

[←352]
Also sometimes referred to as the Presidential Guard

[←353]

Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke's comment on Rindel's role was never followed up by the media or investigated. Instead, the narrative that EO was the cause of destabilisation in Sierra Leone remains to this day

[←354]

Dodson Aviation, owned by Rindel, again popped up during Simon Mann's abortive coup in Equatorial Guinea. See Chapter 48

[←355]

This was actually Carl Faber and ‘Oosie Oosthuizen’, both ex-Special Forces operators

[←356]
https://mg.co.za/article/1998-10-20-24-executed-in-s-leone

[←357]

Neill was awarded the SADF's Honoris Crux medal for bravery in 1983

[←358]

These troops were from an Indian army unit as opposed to a British army Gurkha unit

[←359]

This was a multinational operation to stage the breakout of the two Indian Gorkha companies surrounded and besieged by the rebels

[←360]

The results of this inquiry were not made public.

[←361]

In 2017, an ex-MI counter-intelligence officer apologised to me for the role he had played in monitoring my and EO's telephones, but told me that he had been ordered to do so as myself and EO were causing massive panic within intelligence circles

[←362]

A mobile or vehicle surveillance team

[←363]

He was referring to our black African members

[←364]

President Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga—commonly referred to as President Mobutu—was at that time the president of Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). After he came to power, Mobutu formed an authoritarian government, stole vast amounts of money, and tried to purge the country of all colonial cultural influence. The United States gave him considerable support due to his supposed anti-communist stance

[←365]

Kopassus (Komando Pasukan Khusus) is the Indonesian Army's Special Forces unit. They conduct missions such as direct action, unconventional warfare, sabotage, counter-terrorism, hostage release, counter-insurgency, and so forth

[←366]

A condition whereby hostages, as a result of time spent with their captors, develop a psychological bond with them

[←367]
See Chapter 38

[←368]

Usually a term used to describe covert or deniable operations. In this instance, it was used to refer to pseudo teams

[←369]

It was later alleged that their aircraft had been shot down with a missile. I had no doubt that it had been supplied by South Africa's Fred Rindel, the man who had provided UNITA with missiles to shoot down EO aircraft

[←370]

Major General Dallaire would later recount the UN's total incompetence in his no-holds-barred book, Shake Hands with the Devil. The massacre Annan forced him to watch unfolding while doing nothing to stop it, still haunts him to this day

[←371]

Had our operational concept been approved by the UN, we would have long been in Rwanda by then

[←372]

Also see https://mg.co.za/article/1995-06-02-sas-arms-dealing-underworld

[←373]

PW Botha was the president of the Republic of South Africa from 1979 to 1989 but was ousted by FW de Klerk in a silent coup in August 1989

[←374]

http://www.timelines.ws/countries/RWANDA.HTML

[←375]

In this instance, they claimed to represent a concerned group of German businessmen who wished to make use of EO's services to bring about peace and stability in Africa

[←376]

I would later be proven very wrong as Rwanda has become a conduit for the illicitly mined resources form Eastern DRC

[←377]

An article is published in the foreign media and subsequently picked up by the local media. This approach to reporting adds more credibility to the local report and allows it to be viewed as confirmed information both at home and abroad

[←378]

Ballesteros needed to play the ‘democracy card’ in order gain credibility with Selebi. Selebi, who later became the Commissioner of the South African Police Services would at a later date face his own special problems related to bribery and corruption

[←379]

Ballesteros was merely confirming the lies the DFA, MI, and the media had been feeding the world with regard to EO being paid in mining concessions

[←380]

Ballesteros never replied to my letter asking him for proof that EO was a racist organisation or that we were associated with members of any right-wing paramilitary organisation

[←381]
See Chapter 40

[←382]

I often wondered where Ballesteros got this lie from

[←383]

It was renamed Papua and West Papua in 2003 and 2007 respectively

[←385]

The decision to utilise EO to implement Spicer's plan resulted in wild claims and allegations that Spicer's Sandline International was an 'EO front'. Once again, poor journalism triumphed

[←386]

MI officers later admitted to me that they were tasked to flood our telephone line with calls to prevent African governments from speaking to me/EO

[←387]

Carl, having acted as EO's senior intelligence officer, had by then been redeployed to PNG from Sierra Leone

[←388]

Singirok was eventually dismissed and faced several inquiries relating to corruption and fraud. He was again reappointed in 1998. In 2000, he was again dismissed after another inquiry into the same allegations. He was unsuccessful in his bid to be elected to parliament in 2007. He now, apparently, operates a taxi company and a security company in Port Moresby

[←389]
Australian Dollars

[←390]

Skate had been very vocal about the engagement of EO in PNG. He was also closely allied with Singirok

[←391]

Covert Procurement Exhibition held annually in the UK

[←392]

It was only on returning to South Africa that I learnt Stucke had had several meetings with people from both the DFA and MI. Their agenda, when we saw Stucke's documentary, was very obvious

[←393]

See https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/who-killed-dulcie-september-1299720

[←394]

For more information on Dulcie September's assassination, see 'Apartheid Guns and Money' by Hennie van Vuuren, Jacana Press, 2017, P209-216

[←395]

Ellis was a British historian who wrote extensively about Africa and particularly about South Africa and the ANC. He was the Desmond Tutu Professor of Social Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. In this instance, Ellis again fabricated his 'facts' to suit his audience. He died in 2015 of leukaemia

[←396]

Pieter and his cronies at MI knew that all my agents, regardless of their positions, locations, or access, had ceased to function and gone dormant when I had left the Directorate Covert Collection. I had dragged parts of my network along with me to the CCB when I left MI. We had simply picked up the strings, and continued working

[←397]
See Chapter 3

[←398]

Pech, in her attempts to make me appear even more sinister, would in her later writings claim that I had undergone several name changes

[←399]

Many years later, I met with Jakkie Cilliers at a university in the Western Cape and confronted him. He apologised to me, claiming that it had not been possible for him to read every document that passed his desk. I accepted his excuse but didn't believe him

[←400]

His Royal Highness

[←401]

Sometime in 1995/6, we established a larger office-HQ in Raslow as Danny Street was being overrun with idle intelligence officers and journalists. This was just as well as I was preparing myself to leave the company I had created

[←402]
See Chapter 44

[←403]

An aircraft, complete with crew, maintenance, and insurance (ACMI) is leased. The lessee, in addition, pays the cost of hours that the aircraft is leased for

[←404]

Laufer was apparently a very colourful US press spokesman who wined and dined reporters, dated the daughter of the US military commander in Berlin, and helped organise former President Ronald Reagan's triumphant return to the Berlin Wall. See http://www.armsdeal-vpo.co.za/articles10/berlin_wonders.html.

[←405]

After the South African elections in 1994, Slovo, a dedicated communist, became the Minister for Housing in newly elected President Nelson Mandela's government. He died of cancer in 1995

[←406]

Swedish defence and civil security contractor

[←407]

This buffoon viewed himself as a ‘Peace campaigner’ but he was quite happy to watch innocent people slaughtered

[←408]

International Alert is considered a non-profit organisation focusing on peace-building activities. Ironically, if conflicts ended, it would find itself without work.

[←409]

In 2017, Norway became the victim of its own self-deception insofar as uncontrolled migration is concerned. Radical groups using refugees as cover have managed to establish themselves in Norway

[←410]

According to the media, the size of EO escalated over time and at some stage, it was reported that EO consisted of more than 5 000 men. This was of course a lie.

[←411]

He was referring to Tim Spicer's contract where we were acting as a sub-contractor. Ironically, no mention was made of that fact. He also conveniently forgot to mention that EO had a government licence to operate

[←412]

This referred to the late Michael Jackson, the American singer, songwriter, and dancer. Exactly what his role was alleged to be is still unknown

[←413]

Known as ‘blowback’

[←414]

The document added, ‘This is not considered to be an isolated case’

[←415]

Apart from this statement being devoid of all truth, MI conveniently forgot that many of the weapons used in the Rwandan bloodbath had come from South Africa's state-owned Armscor

[←416]

This, according to MI, had been confirmed by a ‘political secretary-general’

[←417]

A commission established by President FW de Klerk to investigate the activities of the Directorate Covert Collection in late 1992

[←418]

Directorate Covert Collection

[←419]

Pappa Whiskey, the code name given to the aircraft and derived from its registration

[←420]
At that time Special Forces SSO Counter Intelligence

[←421]

I was unable to verify the abbreviations of SGO and KVN. I assumed that reference was being made to 'Senior Government Officials' and that KVN was a misspelt abbreviation for KZN (KwaZulu Natal).

[←422]

Red mercury is a mythical substance that supposedly possesses massive destructive power

[←423]

Mo Shaik later became the director general of the newly formed South African Secret Service, the country's foreign collection agency. It underwent several name changes including NI, NIA, DONS and so on.

[←424]

Stander was apparently the operative behind the creation of the EO Viking Group, a company established in Puerto Rico and aimed at using EO's name to conduct covert operations. He was, in late 2016, contracted by the South African Minister of State Security/State Security Agency (SSA) to conduct a covert operation on behalf of the government. He promptly compromised the operation

[←425]

Secret documents later circulated would implicate EO in Operation Hammer. For information on Operation Hammer, see http://www.deepblacklies.co.uk/hammer_blurb.htm

[←426]

State Security Agency (SSA), created in 2009, is now the name of the department that is responsible for all civilian intelligence operations

[←427]

Apparently her registered birth name is Karen and not Khareen

[←428]

We had no offices in Meyerspark or Hatfield. I assumed the ‘Centurion office’ referred to Raslow

[←429]

Jardine Fleming was not a person but a Hong Kong–based investment bank. ‹Anonymous› was probably not aware of this fact although he later misplaced Jardine Fleming in terms of its location

[←430]

Potgieter, a man who claimed to be one of South Africa's greatest investigative journalists was certainly unable to get his facts correct. The reasons for this would later become clear to me

[←431]

Wetworks is a euphemism for assassination, alluding to the spilling of blood.

[←432]

I use the terms ‘DFA’ and ‘MI’ in the general sense. Not all of their members were engaged in—or supported—UNITA and the plans to overthrow the MPLA government

[←433]

Although I have no proof, I suspect that this was one of the reasons my residence was subjected to the large scale Scorpions raid

[←435]

Haseldine, a former British diplomat was, on several occasions, suspended from his position and eventually dismissed from the diplomatic service. Private Eye viewed Haseldine as ‘everyone’s favourite Lockerbie crank Patrick ‘clinically sane’ Haseldine’ (http://www.megrahiyouaremyjury.net/?p=995)

[←436]

http://m.news24.com/news24/Columnists/AletJvRensburg/we-are-all-dying-of-a-broken-heart-20170704

[←437]

Mine resistant, ambush protected

[←438]

Strategic Communications Operation, in essence, a disinformation operation

[←439]

The book was published by the ISS in 1999 with the title Peace, Profit or Plunder?

[←440]

This statement was false as by then, EO had already been deployed to Angola and MI, DFA, and Cleary were already expressing their concern to various quarters, including the media

[←441]

The Star, 5 November 2007

[←442]
http://www.sttepi.com/default.aspx

[←443]

https://chrisblattman.com/2013/10/30/is-the-newyorker-publishing-puff-profiles-of-mercenaries-executive-outcomes-now- its-joseph-kony-related)/

[←444]
http://www.romeodallaire.com/index.php/rwanda-genocide/

[←445]

http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/in-car-un-contractors-bribed-to-aid-muslims-20171027

[←446]

Oil, diamonds, gold, uranium, and transport routes

[←447]

An early morning television programme

[←448]

A large military training and residential area located to the south-west of Pretoria, now known as Thaba Tshwane

[←449]

This website has subsequently been shut down

[←450]

Stander was a key figure in another intelligence operation known as Project Hammer

[←451]

Robert ‘Bob’ Kovacic was a US Army Lt Colonel. Northbridge is still in operation and has utilised the global map from EO’s logo as part of their logo. Kovacic is currently the President of Northbridge Services Group (http:// northbridgeservices.org/index.htm)

[←452]

http://www.kathryncramer.com/kathryn_cramer/2004/09/private_militar.html

[←453]

EO never had a ‘US arm’ as alleged, let alone a ‘president’ for such an arm

[←454]

EO never had offices in Panama

[←455]

Blackwater has, since the initial publication of this book in 2007, undergone several name changes, but it remains a powerful player in the market

[←456]

In November 2017, Mugabe was ousted by his own political party

[←457]

Many years later I would learn from someone who had been present at a meeting, that they were not only monitoring the situation—the South African authorities, along with their Zimbabwean counterparts were fully aware of the nature of the operation, and had in fact been active participants in its initial planning

[←458]

Taylor was arrested in March 2006 and indicted for war crimes. He was found guilty of the charges and sentenced to 50 years imprisonment. See http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12392062

[←459]

Simon Mann had no role to play in EO's inception or management and he was never a director of the company as is so often alluded. Instead, by association, he enjoyed the insinuation that he was. Both Simon Witherspoon and Niek du Toit served Executive Outcomes loyally. They were however never part of its inception nor formation. Mann apparently admitted to a British journalist that, by cleverly using inference, he had created the perception that he was a founder and manager of EO

[←460]

Van der Westhuizen is, at the time of revision (2017), working for a Johannesburg-based defence company

[←461]

https://mg.co.za/article/2004-08-27-mark-thatchers-difficulty

[←462]

Jeffery Archer is a well-known British author.

[←463]

Email interview on 18 August 2017 with a team leader of Mann's mission

[←464]
https://www.ft.com/content/ecca0050-ddf7-11df-88cc-00144feabdc0

[←465]

I am in possession of a number of Cleary's 'Angolan Update' documents. It is clear that they were intended to manipulate President Thabo Mbeki and others into closing EO down so that Cleary and his numerous business and government clients—including Savimbi—could achieve their objectives

[←466]

South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry

[←467]

Given Cleary's past history of lies and deceit, Erinys was aptly named, especially the snake-headed part. Given the current mess in Iraq, it is no surprise that Cleary put himself out as a 'specialist'. However, the records of companies such as Erinys leave much to be desired

[←468]

Sean Cleary is now, apart from numerous other titles, the executive vice chairman of the FutureWorld Foundation. See https://www.theglobalist.com/ Sean Cleary is now, apart from numerous other titles, the executive vice chairman of the FutureWorld Foundation. See https://www.theglobalist.com/

[←469]

U3A consists of groups of people who come together to share knowledge, skills, and experience

[←470]

Bulelani Ngcuka was the first national Director of Public Prosecutions in South Africa

[←471]

https://mg.co.za/article/2005-05-13-ngcuka-exrecce-team-up

[←472]

Rooiplaas, (Literally ‘ Red Farm’).

[←473]

Savimbi's death is today still falsely attributed to EO

[←474]
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNITA

[←475]

http://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/declassified-apartheid-profits-chinas-support-for-apartheid-revealed-20171101

[←476]

For more information, See Van Vuuren, H., Apartheid Guns and Money, Jacana Media, Sunnyside, 2017

[←477]

https://ratical.org/co-globalize/CynthiaMcKinney/news/pr010416.htm

[←478]

https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2012/01/17/mass-escapee-turned-liberian-dictator-had-spy-agency-ties/DGBhSfjxPVrtoo4WT95bBI/story.html

[←479]

https://www.rutherford.org/publications_resources/oldspeak/in_a_leaking_life_raft

[←480]

At his trial, Taylor claimed that Robinson had 'volunteered to make Liberia's case before U.S. administration officials, and had spoken directly to President Bush about Taylor. He also confirmed that Robertson's company, Freedom Gold Limited, had signed an agreement to exploit gold in south-eastern Liberia, but that it never generated any profit' (http:// foreignpolicy.com/2010/02/05/charles-taylor-pat-robertson-was-my-man-in-washington/).

[←481]

The Virginian Pilot article dated 2 June 1999 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(Liberian_politician)).

[←482]

I am currently the chairman of STTEP International Ltd (Special Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection).

[←483]

Arthur Walker passed away on 28 March 2016. He was twice awarded the Honoris Crux Gold decoration during the South African Border War. The Honoris Crux Gold was the highest military award for bravery awarded to members of the South African Defence Force.

[←484]
https://libyaagainstsuperpowermedia.org/2017/10/27/the-solution-for-libya/amp/

[←485]

https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/more-money-for-peacekeeping-in-africa-257032

[←486]

Now known as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)

[←487]

Formed by dissident Ugandans as a puritanical Muslim group, they later merged with the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda, and the Uganda Muslim Liberation Army

[←488]

Sahel, Arabic Sāḥil, (is a) semiarid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to The Sudan. It forms a transitional zone between the arid Sahara (desert) to the north and the belt of humid savannas to the south. The Sahel stretches from the Atlantic Ocean eastward through northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, the great bend of the Niger River in Mali, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), southern Niger, north-eastern Nigeria, south-central Chad, and into The Sudan (https://www.britannica.com/place/Sahel)

[←489]

http://www.fin24.com/Companies/Advertising/bell-pottinger-collapses-after-racial-tensions-scandal-in-sa-20170912

[←490]

https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-20-darkness-descends-on-kpmg/.

[←491]

US President Donald Trump referred to this phenomenon as ‘fake news’. The South African media was at the forefront of developing and propagating fake news insofar as EO was concerned

[←492]

Our warning about the pending Seleka invasion of Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013 was discarded as 'scare mongering'. This resulted in the deaths of several SANDF troops, the collapse of the CAR government, and the ousting of its president. Similar warnings have been issued regarding other African states—to date, they have all been ignored

[←494]

Agitation propaganda. South Africa itself has become a victim of such action. The approach followed by the UK ‘public relations’ company Bell Pottinger resulted in deep divisions across South Africa.

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